

BRILL'S COMPANION TO
SOPHOCLES



Edited by
Andreas Markantonatos

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Sophocles

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2012

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Brill's companion to Sophocles / edited by Andreas Markantonatos.
pages. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-18492-3 (hardback : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-90-04-21762-1 (e-book) 1.

Sophocles—Criticism and interpretation. I. Markantonatos, Andreas.

PA4417.B78 2012

882'.01—dc23

2012021091

This publication has been typeset in the multilingual “Brill” typeface. With over 5,100 characters covering Latin, IPA, Greek, and Cyrillic, this typeface is especially suitable for use in the humanities. For more information, please see www.brill.nl/brill-typeface.

ISSN 1872-3357

ISBN 978 90 04 18492 3 (hardback)

ISBN 978 90 04 21762 1 (e-book)

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This companion to Sophocles, one of the most celebrated dramatists of all time, has been more than three years in the making. Anyone who has ever attempted to co-ordinate, not least share thoughts and opinions with more than thirty leading scholars with the purpose of producing a multifaceted work on an ancient author would agree that this is truly a Herculean task. The editor of this volume by no means lays claim to superhuman abilities, and so I feel duty-bound to express my deepest gratitude to the numerous contributors, who have never failed to deliver well-argued and clear-eyed essays, thereby lightening the burden of correcting the final proofs. I therefore feel privileged to have worked on the *Brill's Companion to Sophocles* with a cohort of world-renowned academic critics, who not only have shown infinite patience and kindness, but also have offered their supreme and acknowledged expertise whenever the need has arisen. Furthermore, my debt is incalculable to Anthony Ossa-Richardson, my proficient and assiduous proofreader, who has been a constant help during the demanding process of correcting what was at the time a Goliath of a manuscript, always providing valuable suggestions and greatly improving both the content and form of the individual chapters by removing blemishes with matchless efficiency. Finally, I should like to acknowledge a particular debt to the people at Brill Press, especially Caroline van Erp, the editor of Classical Studies, as well as Rachel Crofut, for help and advice in all matters pertaining to the publication of the book. If not otherwise noted, translations of substantial Sophoclean passages are reprinted from *Sophocles: Volume I and Volume II*, Loeb Classical Library Volumes 20 & 21, translated by H. Lloyd-Jones, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1994, by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Loeb Classical Library® is a registered trademark of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Having lived nearly all my student life admiring Sophocles, I am humbled by the thought that as a mature scholar I have been given the opportunity to contribute to a better understanding of his plays alongside a host of critics capable of inspiring the same admiration for this prominent Athenian dramatist to their students. There is no doubt in my mind that this abundant praise for Sophocles is totally justifiable. I profoundly believe that Sophocles can teach his audiences and readers that what he ambiguously calls τὸ γενναῖον, namely our inner character, the first cell of the human organism in its

pure uniqueness and freshness immediately prior to being divided and multiplied to reach the scale of a full-grown person, is strong enough to endure with dignity the ravages of time and the sufferings that life has in store for all of us. For that reason the prolonged labour of editing this multi-authored volume is gratefully dedicated to my first tutor and doting grandmother, an accomplished educator and lover of Greek literature and culture, who has taught me that time and experience are inexhaustible sources of fortitude and endurance:

Αἰκατερίνη Λιβιεράτου

In memoriam

Athens—Kalamata, 2012

Andreas Markantonatos

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAH	D.M. Lewis/J. Boardman/J.K. Davies/M. Ostwald (eds.), <i>The Cambridge Ancient History</i> , 14 vols. (Cambridge, 1970–2001)
DK	H. Diels/W. Kranz, <i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker</i> , 3 vols. (Berlin, 1952)
FGrHist	F. Jacoby (ed.), <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> , 15 vols. (Berlin/Leipzig/Leiden, 1923–1958)
IG	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i> (Berlin, 1873–)
K-A	See PCG
LDAB	<i>Leuven Database of Ancient Books</i> (http://www.trismegistos.org/ldab/)
LGGA	<i>Lessico dei Grammatici Greci Antichi</i> , University of Genova (http://www.aristarchus.unige.it/lgga/)
LIMC	H. Ackermann/J.R. Gisler (eds.), <i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> (Zurich/Munich, 1981–1999)
LSJ	H.G. Liddell/R. Scott/H.S. Jones, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Oxford, 1940 ⁹ with Revised Supplement 1996)
MP ³	<i>Base de données expérimentale Mertens-Pack 3</i> , Centre de Documentation de Papyrologie Littéraire, University of Liège (http://www2.ulg.ac.be/facphl/services/cedopal/index.htm)
OCD	S. Hornblower/A. Spawforth (eds.), <i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> (Oxford/New York, 1996 ³)
OCT	Oxford Classical Texts Series
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
PCG	R. Kassel/C. Austin, <i>Poetae Comici Graeci</i> (Berlin/New York, 1983–)
PMG	D.L. Page, <i>Poetae Melici Graeci</i> (Oxford, 1963)
POxy	<i>Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i> (Oxford, 1898–)
POxy Hels.	Ziliacus, H. et al. (eds.) <i>Fifty Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i> (Helsinki, 1979)
P.S.I.	<i>Papiri greci e latini</i> (Florence, 1912–)
P.Tebt.	<i>The Tebtunis Papyri</i> (London/New York, 1902–)
RE	A. Pauly/G. Wissowa (eds.), <i>Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> , 83 vols. (Stuttgart/Munich, 1894–1980)
SEG	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i> (Leiden, 1923–)
S-M	B. Snell/H. Maehler, <i>Pindarus</i> , vols. I–II (Stuttgart/Leipzig, 1987–1989, 1997–2001)
TrGF	B. Snell/R. Kannicht/S. Radt, <i>Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> (Göttingen, 1971–2004)

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INTRODUCTION

SOPHOCLES AND HIS CRITICS

Andreas Markantonatos

When writing about an ancient author and his work, we cannot escape the feeling that we are faced with a nearly impossible task: more often than not textual evidence is in short supply, while the enormous distance separating ancient author from modern critic adds a further complication to any attempt at making sense of important issues of historical and social relevance. Writing about Sophocles is no exception. The more we study his work, the more we realize that any conclusions regarding dramaturgy and style, as well as textual criticism and interpretation, must be treated as tentative and contingent. The sceptic may argue that theories purporting to unravel the intricacy of ancient plays have no solid basis in hard fact, and what is more, numerous tantalizing snippets of ancient biographical information are either overblown or fabricated. There is a growing feeling among students of Sophocles that specialists of different theoretical hues and backgrounds have talked too much and too confidently about the poet and his work without paying heed to the considerable difficulties in appraising the veracity of the biographical stories, as well as the fiendish complexity of the textual evidence.

This is partly true. Sophoclean drama has constantly drawn the viewing and reading public, as well as academic experts from all over the world, with its remarkable leading characters of fiery passion and immovable bravery, determined valour and iron firmness. To this we should add Sophocles' complete mastery of dramatic technique which is unforgettably displayed in the structural arrangement of the plots and the innovative expansion of popular mythical stories. It therefore comes as no surprise that since antiquity people have tried to unlock some of the secrets of his stagecraft by either dissecting his plays or situating his work in its historical and social context. The playtexts of Sophocles have had a magnetic effect on lovers of theatre: the survival of even a tiny portion of his dramatic output over more than two millennia speaks volumes for his popularity. Considering the technological inefficiencies of manuscript transmission, as well as the gradual decline of the oral diffusion of texts, it is nothing less than a miracle

that seven extant plays survived the Middle Ages during which the bulk of ancient Greek literature vanished without trace.

Sophoclean scholarship has a very long history with striking modifications in emphasis and, in certain cases, bewildering changes in viewpoint.¹ When we survey the ancients' take on Sophocles, starting from the original audience of the plays and moving on to Aristotle and the Alexandrian scholars, we become conscious of the fact that the critical idiom shifted from a purely interpretative perspective to a distinctly editorial approach which put a high priority on the reconstitution of the original Sophoclean texts.² In the first phase of Sophoclean criticism, Aristotle's *Poetics* marked the impressive culmination of centuries of theoretical reflection on Greek tragedy: a wide assortment of interpretations was finally woven into a compelling argument which was to exert an unprecedented influence on modern criticism.³

Ironically, it was Aristotle's flair for creating complicated taxonomies which encouraged the Hellenistic scholars in their focus on the reconstruction of ancient playscripts and the classification of textual evidence. Much as Aristotle formulated a highly convincing proposal which was wide enough to include important aspects of tragic experience, brilliantly enriching a functionalist account of Greek tragedy with crucial elements of aesthetic naturalism and moral realism, Alexandrian critics felt it their duty to establish authoritative texts of the plays which were meticulously catalogued in the Library of Alexandria, as well as producing commentaries (some of them quite voluminous) on selected works. Awed by the sheer force of Aristotle's general theoretical formulation, they chose to direct their energies to editing Sophocles rather than grappling with interpretation. Their choice proved a wise one, for it is to their intellectual vigour that we owe not only the survival of a large part of Sophocles' dramas well into the second century BC, but also a gigantic body of scholia and brief critical judgements on the plays. Of especial significance is the editorial attention of Aristophanes of Byzantium, who defended manuscript tradition against extensive revisions made by actors and directors.⁴

¹ See recently Lloyd-Jones (1994a) 15–24; Easterling (2006a); Goldhill/Hall (2009). Although rather dated, both Kirkwood (1957) and Friis Johansen (1962) remain notable for their penetration and insight. There are various online bibliographical guides to publications on the ancient world in general and Sophocles in particular, but *L'Année Philologique*, *Gnomon Online*, and *TOCS-IN* are beyond compare.

² See principally Lada (1993) and (1996); cf. recently Lada-Richards (2008).

³ See (e.g.) Halliwell (1987), (1998²) and (2002) esp. 177–233.

⁴ See Pfeiffer (1968) 87–104; Reynolds/Wilson (1991³) 5–18; Garland (2004) 39–48;

The prevalent feeling that Aristotelian logic is incontestable, as well as an increasing alertness to the intricacies of the textual transmission of Greek tragedy, turned the attention of critics away from theoretical speculation towards more practical purposes. This stream of scholarship on purely textual problems continued to flow uninterrupted until the middle of the 19th century, when there appeared a faint gleam of what was later to develop into a complex network of competing critical theories. It is indicative of Aristotle's colossal impact on classical scholarship that academic specialists began to question in earnest basic premises of the *Poetics* as late as the twentieth century: this concerted attempt to surpass Aristotelian methods spawned new theoretical propositions which provided a wider perspective on Greek tragedy. In fact, the emergence of some radical but thought-provoking theories (Deconstruction being a case in point) initiated discussion on many fronts in which numerous aspects of Attic drama look different in dialogue with each other.

It is to be regretted that Roman and Byzantine scholarship failed to meet the challenge of producing important works on Sophocles, with the exception of Demetrius Triclinius, a native of Thessalonica, who created his own recension of the extant plays out of several important manuscripts in fourteenth century. Although Greek tragedy exerted an enormous influence on Latin-speaking elites, and Byzantine men of letters often bolstered their arguments with copious quotations from tragic plays, classical philology, unsystematically practised for centuries until the dawn of Renaissance Humanism, was well below par compared with the illustrious achievements of the Hellenistic period. To be fair, Byzantine scholars should be credited with preserving a large number of important manuscripts, as well as furnishing them with helpful exegetical scholia; moreover, the massive exodus of Greek scholars from a failing Byzantine Empire was a major infusion of new talent into Western intellectual life.⁵

The Renaissance ushered in fresh ideas about the interpretation of Attic drama, but again it was the urgent need for the preservation of the ancient works which occupied centre stage in contemporary scholarly circles. Apparently Renaissance critics were too concerned with the protection of their classical legacy and the establishment of reliable texts to expend

Markantonatos (2013). It must be remembered throughout that 'it is to Alexandria that we owe our existing texts, and almost the whole of the information that can be recovered concerning the lost plays' (Pearson 1917, I. xxxv).

⁵ See principally Reynolds/Wilson (1991³) 44–78 and esp. 75–77; Garland (2004) 69–87 and esp. 85–87 on the Palaeologan Renaissance. Cf. also Wilson (1983a) and (1992).

valuable time on close readings of Greek plays. Not unlike the Alexandrian scholars, humanists resisted the lure of grand theory, choosing instead to master the Greek language in all its dialectal sophistication and search far and wide for lost manuscripts. Once more the students of Greek literature selected the wisest course of action. The following centuries saw the publication of numerous *editiones principes*—the Aldine edition of Sophocles was published in 1502.⁶ Moreover, the revival of interest in Greek tragedy provided the main impetus for a string of impressive performances of select plays—in 1585 an Italian version of *Oedipus Tyrannus* was staged at the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza to popular acclaim.⁷

Although it took more than three centuries for the performance tradition of Greek drama to gather momentum, the critical study of the Sophoclean text instantly became a magnet for the best minds in classical scholarship: German, French, and British experts devoted their energy to collating Greek manuscripts and producing authoritative editions of the plays. Not only did they make determined attempts to integrate a large part of the ancient scholia into learned commentaries, but they also offered lucid interpretations of the plays, thereby shedding light on a wide range of difficult problems concerning political, social, and philosophical aspects of Sophocles' dramatic art. Especially, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, R.F.P. Brunck, Gottfried Hermann, and Wilhelm Dindorf, together with August Nauck and F.H.M. Blaydes, brought out many critical editions of Sophocles, never shying away from the most thorny textual questions, and not always avoiding controversy.

The last years of the nineteenth century saw a remarkable resurgence of interest in Sophoclean tragedy, mainly because the generality of leading scholars were averse to unrestrictive emendation, choosing instead to resituate the plays within their original context, as well as discussing the primary traits of the Sophoclean hero. There is no doubt that Lewis Campbell and Richard Jebb were the forerunners of a sea change in Sophoclean scholarship, giving measure and shape to the experience of viewing Greek tragedy through the lens of the ancient audience by combining a profound insight into Hellenic culture with an unrivalled knowledge of the Greek language.⁸ Especially the latter, despite Hugh Lloyd-Jones' feeble attempt to diminish

⁶ On the Aldine Press, see (e.g.) Garland (2004) 105–110; see also Borza (2003) and (2007) on the reception of Sophocles in the 16th century.

⁷ See also Vidal-Naquet (1990c); Wiles (2000) 179–183.

⁸ See (e.g.) Lloyd-Jones (1994a) 18–20.

his learning by extolling instead his phenomenally well-read German contemporaries,⁹ remains the most brilliant author of modern Sophoclean studies, having produced excellent commentaries on (together with admirable translations of) the seven extant plays of Sophocles, as well as having laid the foundations of a comprehensive edition of the Sophoclean fragments. His criticism is unrivalled in its intensity, breadth, and impact, while at the same time his fine feeling for Greek allows him to open unimagined vistas into ancient sensibilities. In the ensuing decades every serious scholar drew inspiration from Jebb's editions, relishing his interpretations and voraciously perusing his enlightening comments.¹⁰

Despite Jebb's and Campbell's occasional tendency to place undue emphasis on the subtlety and delicacy of tragic portraiture, to say nothing of their receptiveness to the once widespread idea that characters' monologues are introspective self-communings revealing many different whims and foibles, it is to their seminal work that a new generation of gifted scholars active in the early part of the twentieth century owes its creative outlook on Sophocles and, more generally, the ancient world. To be fair, a German academic, Tycho von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, son of the most erudite classical scholar of modern times, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, and grandson of Theodor Mommsen, the renowned historian and jurist, should also be given credit for turning the focus of scholarly criticism away from fanciful psychologizing readings and far-fetched conjectural emendations, towards a more conscious understanding of Sophocles' technical proficiency.¹¹

Both schools of thought, one focusing on elegant explications of the plays' characters and subject matter (while retaining an awareness of textual difficulties), the other favouring a detailed analysis of dramatic structures (readily falling back on dependable Aristotelian propositions), constitute a remarkable outpouring of critical energy, knowledge, and intelligence. But in the course of time the latter school would fall behind, as the initial enthusiasm for uncovering the hidden details of composition gradually faded. This result appears to have been due, not so much to any inherent insufficiency in the theory *per se*, as to the slowly dawning realization that this kind

⁹ (1994a) 20.

¹⁰ Cf. Stray (2007). Jebb's full editions of all seven plays of Sophocles have been recently reissued under the guidance of P.E. Easterling, who furnishes each volume in this series with a general introduction to the man and his work.

¹¹ Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1917). Cf. also Kamerbeek (1934); Lloyd-Jones (1972).

of formalist abstraction disregards the vital principles binding together the parts of the play in a continuous chain of cause and effect and, what is worse, excludes contextual matters in favour of pedantic exaggeration. At the same time, it certainly did not help that most of the interpreters who followed in Tycho von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's footsteps failed to rise to the challenge of developing and refining his theory. Karl Reinhardt apart, not one of the critics working on the assumption that the delineation of character is by no means the dominant feature of the plays suggested larger conclusions about Sophocles' dramatic technique; in fact, Tycho's most loyal acolytes showed no special penetration or insight in their view of the plots, as they were blinded by the illustrious achievement of their famous predecessor.¹²

If German formalist criticism was a spent force, critics in the following decades pursued the explication of the layered context and content of tragic texts, producing notable results. More specifically, in the mid-twentieth century a host of brilliant scholars offered engaging discussions and interpretations of the Sophoclean corpus, helping readers unravel the complex web of literary, social, political, and religious allusions often found in dramas, as well as considering the process by which Sophocles throws the central characters of his plays into startling relief. Although it is extremely difficult to choose the most eminent of these scholars, who not only cast fresh light on important aspects of Sophocles' poetry, but also provided a reliable and highly accessible point of entry to the subject, one is tempted to acknowledge the significant contribution of two exceptional individuals: C.M. Bowra and B.M.W. Knox.¹³ As different as they were in temperament and style, both made a profound impact on the modern study of Greek tragedy by producing superb close readings of Sophocles' masterworks.¹⁴ In disentangling Sophocles' ideas from a variety of naïve viewpoints and ahistorical methodologies, they brought out the intellectual subtlety and the emotional power that characterize these ancient plays. More importantly, while keenly aware of the difficulties involved in discovering thematic patterns on the basis of meagre textual evidence, they attempted to discover what the plays meant to Sophocles' contemporaries by integrating

¹² Reinhardt (1979) with an introduction to the English edition by Hugh Lloyd-Jones, who justly argues that 'Reinhardt's book ... accepted and developed what was best in Tycho's work and provided an ideal corrective to what was wanting' (p. xx).

¹³ Bowra (1944); Knox (1957).

¹⁴ On Bowra, see recently Mitchell (2009); Knox offers a touching self-portrait in Knox (1989) xi–xxxv.

the insights and talents of the literary theorist and the cultural anthropologist with an unrivalled knowledge of classical scholarship.

One of the most fortunate results of this theory-explosion in the 1940s and 1950s is that classicists who had sought to establish the continuity of Greek literature not only had the pleasure, at long last, of recognizing the fifth-century transformation of the epic hero in Sophocles' commanding characters; they also became conscious of tragedy's constant and fruitful tension between myth and reality, the legendary stories of Greek heroes and the Athenian democratic *polis*. Although the 'hero-worshipping' theory of the forties and fifties (emphasizing the fierce antagonism between the Sophoclean hero's unbending will and the irrational wickedness of gods and men) has been much reviled for its lack of sophistication,¹⁵ the basic idea that 'the miseries of life may call out greatness in him who resists them'¹⁶ allows us not only to appreciate the core values of Greek civilization but also to grasp more clearly the central paradox stemming from the interlocking homologies of human and divine spheres, upper and lower worlds, life and death—namely, that the hero fulfils himself in self-sacrifice. Through their prolific writings Bowra and Knox, together with other capable scholars such as T.B.L. Webster, H.D.F. Kitto, C. Whitman, F.J.H. Letters, S.M. Adams, G.M. Kirkwood, and D.W. Lucas, raised the debate over the tragic agent's will to a new level, thereby refining Jebb's insights into the Greek conception of act and motive, while simultaneously giving special focus to the problems and the passionate disputes of the Athenian democracy between considerations of personal honour and loyalty to the state.¹⁷

Despite treating religious determinism and free will as totally incompatible, these critics placed strong emphasis on the idea (so emblematic of Sophocles' work) that there is behind the individual action a universal situation which provides a wider perspective on the characters' inner contortions, never allowing their doubts to eliminate more affirmative and joyous values. It is no wonder, then, that Oedipus' indomitable will and intransigence, as well as his reckless passion, have attracted modern interpreters who seek to show that the human interest of Sophocles' plays is by

¹⁵ See the sobering comments by Scodel (2005) 235; cf. also Winnington-Ingram (1980) 8–10 and 13.

¹⁶ Bowra (1944) 354.

¹⁷ See (e.g.) Webster (1936/1969²); Kitto (1939/1961³); Whitman (1951); Letters (1953); Adams (1957); Kirkwood (1958/1994²); Lucas (1959²) esp. 120–172. Cf. also Perrotta (1935); Untersteiner (1935); Waldock (1951), whose explication of Sophoclean drama is seriously marred by excessive pedantry and adherence to hazy literary principles; Maddalena (1959/1963²); Musurillo (1967).

no means subordinated to terrible, stark insights into divine law, but rather emphasized with such persistency as to give a different moral to the mythical stories, fixing our attention on the virtues of the protagonists, while at the same time clarifying the complexities of ancient religious thinking.

Although the centrality of Oedipus as exemplar of the tragic hero in modern discussions of Attic drama has recently come under scrutiny, critics have concurred in the view that the delineation of Oedipus' courage and moral stamina, especially in such masterpieces as *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, gives significance to Sophocles' own personal feelings and speculations about the nature of the universe and the shifting currents of human fortune. It is true that some scholars, not least Bowra and Knox, have overstated the popular idea that in the dramatization of the Oedipus story Sophocles has depicted the supreme crisis of human destiny; nonetheless, there are strong grounds for thinking that Oedipus is indeed the symbolic condensation of great principles, the beneficent operation of which becomes increasingly manifest as humanity strives against an impersonal and inscrutable determination which merely allows an element of ethical reflection to enter into events of far-reaching consequences, although tardily and frustratingly.¹⁸ It is on the Sophoclean hero that wave after wave of the action bursts, until hope gives way to despair, not for himself only, but for his close family and friends; nevertheless, it is no less true that he is eventually judged by the degree of choice and decision which he gives to his struggle with a remote and violent past.

This is sufficiently proved by the spectacular heroization of Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, which secures the grace of heroic spirit in adversity to the Sophoclean drama, albeit slowly and with extreme effort. It is a play within the play, an action rising from Oedipus' first moment of clarity and insight in the prologue where he states calmly and confidently that his sufferings, his nobility, and the time that has long been his companion, have taught him to be content with his fate (7–8, στέργειν γὰρ αἱ πάθαι με χῶ χρόνος ξυνὼν/μακρὸς διδάσκει καὶ τὸ γενναῖον τρίτον), until the culmination is reached after a continuous oscillation between sorrow and joy, and the majestic finale comes at long last.¹⁹ One is tempted to suggest that this impressive statement is the final result of Sophocles' long and profound meditation on human destiny, encapsulating the very soul of his tragedy:

¹⁸ See the seminal discussion in Knox (1989) 45–60, where it is convincingly argued that 'Oedipus did have one freedom: he was free to find out or not find out the truth' (p. 60).

¹⁹ See recently Markantonatos (2002) 115–160 and (2007) 113–119.

namely, that suffering is ennobled by the value of higher motives, while time, our only lifelong companion, puts everything into illuminating perspective, provided of course our spirit is suffused with this almost untranslatable *γενναῖον* which appears to be the only barrier against the capricious course of human affairs.²⁰ Without wishing to overstretch the point, it is not too bold to argue that twentieth-century critics, especially those writing about Attic drama after the horrors of the Second World War, have treated Greek tragedy in general and Sophocles in particular as a powerful consolatory mechanism, putting it to audiences that justice might be done upon offenders, as the atrocity of their crimes deserved, while simultaneously expressing sympathy for guiltless victims, urging upon its spectators the principle that who you are is not what you were made to suffer.

Much as the tortured figure of Oedipus is an important intellectual tool with which to consider central issues in Sophocles and Greek tragedy, the modern preoccupation with his superhuman qualities has misled several critics into believing that the Sophoclean hero, engrossed as he is in a never-ending conflict with divine law, finds himself in a timeless void, striving in vain against the calm and predetermining foresight of shadowy supreme powers. The following theoretical formulation is a symptom of this widespread tendency to play down historical and political considerations in deference to the uniqueness of one great central figure: 'The Sophoclean hero acts in a terrifying vacuum, a present which has no future to comfort and no past to guide, an isolation in time and space which imposes on the hero the full responsibility for his own action and its consequences'.²¹ Knox may be right to think that Oedipus serves as the archetypal hero who finds his own way to the truth at a terrible price, making the most intimate decisions free from external compulsion, but the enormous pressure for 'hero-worshipping' interpretations without sufficient reflection on context has atrophied the creative impulse of many a modern scholar. That was until the groundbreaking theories of French thinkers such as Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet took root in Europe and America in the 1970s and 1980s.²² Tragedy was now seen as a glorifying projection of democratic power and duty, and the engagement in dramatic festivals as a focal point

²⁰ Cf. Mills (2012).

²¹ Knox (1964) 5.

²² On the Paris school of classical scholarship, see principally the brief but illuminating sketch by Zeitlin (1991), which focuses on the shaping influence of Jean-Pierre Vernant on the modern study of Greek literature and mythology.

of civic experience for the Athenian audiences. Regarded from this wider point of view, Oedipus, as well as inspiring audiences with sympathetic terror in his craving for knowledge concerning his real identity, although utterly blind as to the doom which hangs over him, also becomes a symbol of the unresolved conflict between political thought and mythical tradition. In Sophocles the gradual emergence of his horrible actions works to uncover the tensions and ambiguities within the obligations of social order, skilfully wedding the Oedipus story with a dark historical vision which is conveniently transposed to a Theban anti-Athens; in epic poetry, by contrast, neither the violation of blood bonds nor the patricidal slaughter are sufficient reasons to remove him from power.²³

The idea of Greek tragedy as an important medium of social inquiry and thought, an analogy of the Athenian Assembly and law-court, has opened new avenues of understanding as to how the plays might have functioned in their contemporary setting. This approach, refined by such British and American classicists as Froma Zeitlin, Charles Segal, and Simon Goldhill, has brought valuable insights to the tragic texts, challenged the validity of long-standing critical problems, and resolved many difficulties in their interpretation.²⁴ But the influence of these theories on Sophoclean studies should not be overstated, mainly because Aeschylus and Euripides have enjoyed the lion's share of scholarly attention in the last few decades. Although in the latter part of the twentieth century an extensive body of critical opinion grew up around the tragic plays, making the political environment of Attic drama much clearer, many experts clung tenaciously to the misconception that Sophocles observes human life from a lofty empyrean—a public figure possessing and exercising a remarkable social charm with no particular thought of wider political issues and concerns.

To their immense credit, William Blake Tyrrell and Larry J. Bennett have attempted to disengage Sophocles from the offshoots and overgrowths of this long-standing simplistic supposition; instead, they have resituated Sophocles' work within the historical context of audience reception by showing the close constitutional resemblance of a highly complex play such as the *Antigone* to the Athenian democratic city.²⁵ Their wide-ranging

²³ See Markantonatos (2007) 43–60.

²⁴ See (e.g.) Zeitlin (1996); Segal (1981a), (1986) and (1995); Goldhill (1986). On the political dimension of Greek tragedy, see recently Markantonatos/Zimmermann (2012) with extensive bibliography.

²⁵ Bennett/Tyrrell (1990) and Tyrrell/Bennett (1998).

historicizing analysis is, without doubt, one of the most important scholarly contributions to Sophoclean studies in recent years, grinding, chipping, and sanding large parts of *Antigone* to remove the dross of misinterpretation. If we stand back from the intense emotions of the play—and Tyrrell and Bennett do just that with remarkable sangfroid—it becomes apparent that ‘in attempting to bury Polyneices, Antigone is reprising a wondrous deed claimed for Athenians by their orators at public funerals since at least the 460s’.²⁶ This approach, which generally follows Zeitlin’s controversial, although helpful, concept of legendary Thebes as the negative model of fifth-century Athens, sees Attic drama as a model of theatre which predicates the material of the Greek mythical stories in a changed, politically charged context and thus most importantly solicits the entry of the spectators into a relation with the stories.²⁷

None of this would have been possible without the gradual infiltration of innovative critical propositions into the traditional discipline of Classics in the last few decades; especially Old and New Historicism, together with audience reception theories, have paved the way not only for a profound reassessment of tragedy’s political texture but also for an integrated explication of drama’s role in the Athenian *polis*, with central premises of democratic ideology forming the core of this interpretation, as well as basic mythical patterns and systematic social relations neatly dissected for unravelling further layers of meaning. This novel perspective is ineluctably connected with modern critical endeavours to address the question of the relationship between fiction and reality by bringing philosophical logic and aesthetics, together with social anthropology, to bear on the interpretation of literary works. More specifically, in the concluding section of his thoughtful monograph on what he flamboyantly, though appositely, called *literary anthropology*, Wolfgang Iser, a world-renowned literary theorist and one of the founders of the Constance School of reception aesthetics, placed strong emphasis on the social function of performance as an important means of human self-definition; as he succinctly put it, ‘staging is the indefatigable attempt to confront ourselves with ourselves, which can be done only by playing ourselves’.²⁸ One cannot but concur with Iser’s opinion that theatre caters to our endless fascination with our own species by offering an

²⁶ Tyrrell/Bennett (1998) 1.

²⁷ Zeitlin (1990) esp. 144–150.

²⁸ Iser (1993) 303; see also Iser (1989). On reader-response criticism, see (e.g.) Freund (1987).

artistic representation of emblematic slices of humanity. Or to put it another way, as we hope will become apparent in some of the chapters contained in this volume, we would be deluding ourselves if we thought that the staging of imaginary stories is completely and utterly divorced from the ever flowing stream of real-life events. We should be in no doubt (and Iser again is adamant about his stance on performance as, among other things, a refined exploration of current issues and concerns through the re-enactment of all-too-human situations) that the plays' tensions and resolutions are relevant in very tangible ways to contemporary ones and in this manner are capable of directing the members of the audience to interpret the staged stories from a conscious understanding of the close relation between fiction and history. Although contextualizing the plays in terms of their reception by the original audience is an extremely complicated task, and for some sceptical critics even a leap in the dark on account of insufficient evidence, the spectators could hardly fail to appreciate the parallels between the fabricated tale and the present moment.²⁹

We would not be far off the mark if we argued that this could not be otherwise because all fictitious worlds are constructed out of real-life components. Regardless of how much these components are warped, in the course of the play, to serve the further purposes of the plotline, distorted through contact with unreal circumstances, or simply turned on their heads for the sake of suspense, at a deeper level theatrical performances have the admirable ability to engage contemporary responses: more often than not the spectators experience an instantaneous connection to the numerous real-life elements of the drama. It is as if the fire of the theatre needs oxygen from the air of the real world in order to burn. In this respect, every imaginary person and event owes its intelligibility to our very real world: fiction presupposes the existence of history, life onstage always follows from contact with life on earth.

Along the lines of these modern theoretical formulations, which profess to relate the events onstage with the real lives of audience members, and once more especially associated with so political a play as Sophocles' *Antigone*, comes another important breakthrough in our assessment of tragedy's remarkable ability to reweave the seamless web of mythological signification in accordance with the Athenian community's special protocols and official ideologies, while at the same time highlighting the role of

²⁹ See Markantonatos (2002) 19–25 with further bibliography.

the theatre as a meeting point of rival voices and standpoints. Greek tragedy in general and Sophoclean tragedy in particular explore, in their own register, central issues regarding ritualized events such as weddings and funerals, as well as sacrificial rites and initiatory ceremonies, which were real-life concerns for both the Athenian and non-Athenian audiences. In particular, Richard Seaford and Rush Rehm, following the seminal work of Froma Zeitlin and Charles Segal, have discussed the ways in which Sophocles integrates wedding and funeral motifs in his plots, laying special emphasis on corrupted rituals—that is, rituals which are distorted or warped by the events of the plays.³⁰ The perversion of ceremonials in Greek tragedy realizes the modern conception of what Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian philosopher, literary critic, and semiotician, has famously called ‘the dialogic’, whereby tragedy has the remarkable ability to internalize the presence of otherness and become marked by shocking elements of inversion inherent in any aspect of social, not least religious activity.³¹ By describing Antigone’s death in terms of sacrifice Sophocles not only retraces a mythical story, offering another and much less evident kind of origin, but also points out a failure of coherence in Creon’s harsh proclamation to forfeit Polyneices’ burial rights, a refusal of the ordinary ritual to achieve the kinds of significance that the Athenians expected from religious experience. It is characteristic of Sophocles’ extraordinary energy in raising unsettling questions about the Athenian *polis*’ venerable principles and axioms that it brings into relation different actions, combines them through perceived similarities, and appropriates them to a common plot. Indeed, we have come a long way since the days when critics chose to direct all their energy into reconstituting Sophocles’ text, while relegating questions of interpretation to the margins.

Although there is no need for us to track down all the recent propositions with a direct bearing on the interpretation of Sophocles’ oeuvre, it would certainly come as a surprise to readers well versed in literary theory if we fail to mention four important critical positions which, although furnished with complex and contentious theoretical concepts and tools, have encouraged readers to be more adventurous in their reading of Greek literature. Not unlike prevalent historicized readings, these equally accepted approaches insist that all instances of tragic discourse have to be considered in a social context, arguing that every word that is launched into social space, not least

³⁰ See Seaford (1986), (1989) and (1994a); Rehm (1994). Cf. also Zeitlin (1965); Segal (1982).

³¹ On Bakhtin’s concept of ‘dialogism’, see (e.g.) Holquist (1990).

into the politically charged space of fifth-century Athens, invites interconnections between the literature and the general culture of a period. Deconstruction, psychoanalytic criticism, feminist theory, and narratology have all revitalized our engagement with tragic texts, as well as charting how meaning is produced either by the actual denial of language's referential function, or by the transfiguration of neurotic fantasy into powerful motivation, or by the breaking down of conventional masculine stereotypes of sexual difference, or even by the identification of particular narrative patterns which are superimposed on wider narrative patterns, thereby making tragedies out of intricate webs of narratives.³² Last but not least, a new significant trend has begun to gain strength in the ever growing field of Sophoclean studies: the performance history of the plays. Inextricably linked to the broader research trend of classical reception, the study of both the commercial and non-commercial productions of Sophocles' dramas has refined our understanding of the remarkable ways in which playtexts are capable of forming chains and cross-currents of meaning with other historical contexts, often far removed in time and space from classical Greece.³³

All in all, the lesson that one might take from this *tour d'horizon* of the numerous theoretical debates of the past two millennia about Sophocles is that, although interpretative theories and techniques are often tied to particular plays or to particular periods, each and every critical position, in its most accomplished form, provides important answers to the wider questions surrounding Sophocles' life and work. This introduction does not claim to have discussed all the diverse inflections of a particularly long critical tradition; it merely aims to offer a map of the most challenging and prominent trends, while at the same time painting in broad strokes how a shift has occurred in scholarly emphasis on Sophocles' dramas from a purely philological approach to a multi-disciplinary, at times even totalizing, interpretative methodology.³⁴ Besides, developments in critical theory

³² On modern (and postmodern) critical approaches to Greek literature, see de Jong/Sullivan (1994); Heath (2003); Schmitz (2007). On the application to Greek tragedy of recent theories of literary criticism, see Goldhill (1997b); Storey/Allan (2005) 230–240. It should be noted that both Gregory (2005) and Bushnell (2005) are essential resources for anyone interested in exploring the various methodologies of contemporary critical discourse on Greek tragedy. Furthermore, for general introductions to tragedy with a strong theoretical orientation, see recently Wallace (2007), Bushnell (2008), and Rabinowitz (2008).

³³ See Hardwick (2003). Cf. also Hall/Macintosh (2005) *passim*; Markantonatos (2007) 231–255; Rodighiero (2007); Macintosh (2009).

³⁴ The bibliography on Sophocles is growing ever larger. See recently Avezzù (2003); Venuti (2003); Sommerstein (2003a); Beer (2004); Garvie (2005); Storey/Allan (2005) esp. 111–

and practice have proliferated especially in the last decade or so, making it impossible to keep up with everything. As regards this companion to Sophocles, however, the editor nurtures higher ambitions of completeness and thoroughness. Written by an international team of distinguished scholars, this volume covers all the major themes and issues concerning Sophocles and his plays in an encompassing yet easily accessible way. Individual chapters introduce readers to the current state of research on particular aspects of Sophocles' drama, as well as affording them vivid insights into the field's complexities and into future possibilities for the work essential to the pursuit of Sophoclean studies. As no less than thirty-two academic experts offer the most comprehensive and authoritative treatments of the subject and of the key debates ever attempted, it is hoped that this volume will prove an up-to-date guide to Sophocles' life and work, as well as providing an essential starting point for those who want to pursue particular topics in more depth.

131; Scodel (2005) and (2011) *passim*; de Jong/Rijksbaron (2006); Jouanna (2007); Cuny (2007); Orsi (2007); Vickers (2008); Morwood (2008); Kitzinger (2008); Ahrens Dorf (2009); Goldhill/Hall (2009); Hall (2010) esp. 299–327; Apfel (2011) esp. 208–348; Kyriakou (2011); Goldhill (2012); Nooter (2012).

PART I

THE POET AND HIS WORK

BIOGRAPHY

William Blake Tyrrell

An account of the life of a man from birth to death is what I call biography.

Arnaldo Momigliano

Two facts remain unimpeachable in the biography of Sophocles: he was elected Treasurer of the Greeks for the Delian League in year 443/2 BC, and he composed tragedies that were presented at the theatre of City Dionysus at Athens during the fifth century BC.¹ Other mostly reliable evidence about his life exists but not enough to support a study of the sort that Arnaldo Momigliano would deem 'the life of a man from birth to death'.² Greeks did not concern themselves with documenting births and deaths, lacking the very concept of such documentation. Sophocles' contemporaries were interested more in men as types than as individuals. After their deaths, with each passing generation, information solidified into traditional modes of remembering in what was essentially still an oral culture. In the fourth and third centuries, writers of biography and handbooks were left to conjure their material, factual and imaginary, from poetry and the writings of their predecessors. Almost everything known about Sophocles is threatened with shipwreck on the reefs of uncertainty and invention. Yet the flotsam of his long and fruitful life allows insight into his public personality.

For a city soon to be dominated by the sea, Athens at the time of Sophocles' birth was a backwater. Political change and upheaval had kept Athenian eyes focused on Attica as they belaboured the social and political crises

¹ Lefkowitz (1981) provides a translation of *Life of Aeschylus* (157–160), *Life of Sophocles* (160–163), and *Life of Euripides* 163–169. For a Greek text of the sources for Socrates' life, see Radt (1977). A Greek text with translation for most of the sources for Sophocles' life cited below may also be found in Tyrrell (2006). For the biography of Sophocles, see von Blumenthal (1936); Webster (1936) 1–17; Schmid/Stählin (1959) 309–325; Lesky (1966) 271–275; Gould (2003) 142–145; Sommerstein (2006) xi–xv. The author gratefully acknowledges the editor's permission to reprint material from my 'The Suda's *Life of Sophocles* (Sigma 815)', *Electronic Antiquity* 9.1 (2006), 3–231. It should be noted that all translations are my own.

² Momigliano (1971) 11.

whose solutions would provide the foundations for their democracy. Sophocles arrived among them in 496 BC. The date rests upon a compromise proposed by Felix Jacoby in his study of the Parian Marble.³ The latter, a marble stele set up on the island of Paros in the Cyclades, lists the dates of notable events from earliest times to 264 BC. Entry 56 gives Sophocles' first victory in tragedy at 469/8 BC at the age of twenty-eight years. By counting exclusively, this places his birth in 497/6 BC. Entry 64 states 406/5 BC as the year of his death at ninety-two, a number that, when added to 406/5 BC and counted inclusively, also yields 497/6 BC as Sophocles' year of birth. Since Sophocles died late in the year, 496 BC is accepted as the standard in the Gregorian calendar.

Such 'dry historical exactitude' was little known to antiquity, as Janet A. Fairweather points out. Writers, she notes, sought other means 'to replace the complications of historical reality with a semblance of order'.⁴ The Hellenistic author of the *Life of Sophocles* resorts to one such method to secure a date for Sophocles' birth by aligning the ages of the greats of the genre. 'Sophocles was seven years younger than Aeschylus and twenty-four years older than Euripides'.⁵ Another example of the technique characterizes the tragic poets by the Greek victory at Salamis over the Persians. Aeschylus fought in it, Sophocles danced in celebration of it, and Euripides was born during it.⁶ The synchronism has Aeschylus among those who won Athenian freedom, Sophocles among those who experienced its joy, and the late-comer Euripides among those who learn of it from others.⁷ Another example, in the *Suda* lexicon, co-ordinates Sophocles' age to that of Socrates.⁸ In these calculations, the biographer cared less for accuracy than for the advantage they confer in relating famous men to one another.

Sophocles' family lived in Colonus, some two and a half kilometres north of the Acropolis. Sophocles must have roamed its glens and grove of trees throughout his life. In the *Oedipus at Colonus*, produced in 401 BC, five years after his death, he immortalized his birthplace and the hill that overlooked it. Here Poseidon first showed men how to use the horse, a gift remembered in its name, Hippius, 'Of the Horse':⁹

³ Jacoby (1980; orig. 1904) 181.

⁴ Fairweather (1974) 256.

⁵ *Vit. Soph.* 2.

⁶ *Vit. Aesch.* 11; *Vit. Soph.* 3; *Vit. Eur.* 3–4.

⁷ Lesky (1966) 271.

⁸ *Suda* sigma 815.

⁹ *Soph. OC* 668–693.

You have come, stranger, to the best place to live
 in this land far-famed for its horses,
 white Colonus, where
 the melodious nightingale
 always sings, sheltered
 beneath verdant valleys
 and settled on the god's wine-dark
 ivy and inviolate
 foliage that abounds in berries
 beyond the reach of the sun
 and the blasts of storm winds.
 Here the reveler Dionysus walks,
 always in the company of the divine nymphs of Nysa.

Wetted by the dews of the heavens,
 the narcissus ever flourishes by day
 with its beautiful clusters, ancient
 garland of the twain goddesses, and, with it,
 too, the saffron-gold crocus. The ranging
 springs of Cephissus' streams
 slumber not or fail to flow,
 but ever and for the day
 the river swiftly nurtures birth
 and traverses with its undefiled waters
 the plains of the breasted earth.
 The choruses of the Muses
 shun not this land,
 neither does Aphrodite of the Golden Reins.

Whatever we do know about Sophocles bespeaks the Athenian aristocrat. The author of his *Life* readily dismisses the calumny that his father, Sophillus, was an artisan or tradesman and a foreigner from the Argolid.¹⁰ 'It was unlikely that someone born of such a father would be thought worthy of a generalship with Pericles or Thucydides, the first men of the city'.¹¹ Sophillus, as a man of the nobility, would not have sullied his hands with metal and wood. He enjoyed profits from the efforts of his skilled slaves to become a wealthy manufacturer, it seems, of knives and swords.¹² He raised his son in prosperity and gave him an education proper to his station. The scant evidence creates a realistic, if not necessarily historical, picture of Sophocles'

¹⁰ Ael. NA 7.39; Vit. Soph. 1; Parian Marble 56; Simas, *Anth. Pal.* 7.21; Clem. Al. 7.74.2. Diod. Sic. 13.103.4 and Suda sigma 815 give the name as Sophilos.

¹¹ Vit. Soph. 1.

¹² Vit. Soph. 1.

youth.¹³ Sophocles trained in wrestling and music, winning crowns in both. His teacher, Lamprus, whom Plutarch ranks with Pindar,¹⁴ implies precocious talent worthy of the expense, and his selection to dance, 'naked and anointed with oil',¹⁵ in the victory celebration at Salamis confirms physical beauty and grace of foot. But the sway toward fact encounters the propensity of biographers of tragic poets to establish early signs of their subject's talent.¹⁶ An oracle directed Aeschylus to compose tragedies, and another informed Euripides' father that his son would receive crowns in contests.¹⁷

During his lifetime, comic poets nicknamed Sophocles the Bee, most likely because his way of putting words together flowed smoothly without the prickly burrs of discordant sounds, mesmerizing their audience.¹⁸ Wherever he learned his craft, it was surely not at Aeschylus' knee, as the *Life* contends.¹⁹ Biographers and historians of philosophers arranged their subjects in successions of teachers and students without regard for historicity.²⁰ During tragedy's formative period, however, poets often acted in their own plays, and he first becomes prominent to our knowledge in this regard. Sophocles danced in his *Plyntriae*, and tossed a ball about in character as the Phaeacian princess, Nausicaa. The role, some say, made him famous.²¹

In *Thamyra*s, Sophocles played the cithara so marvellously that, some say, he was depicted holding a lyre in a painting hung on the wall of the Stoa Poikile. Built between 475–450 BC and named from its paintings, this porch consisted of an outer row of Doric columns enclosing Ionic columns, bounded at the ends by a short wall and paralleled by another. With a sheltering roof, it became a popular rendezvous in the life of the city.²² A painter may have rendered a cithara player in the likeness of the dramatist. Yet by iconographic convention, the scroll or mask, not the lyre, marks the dramatist.²³

¹³ *Vit. Soph.* 1 and 3; *Ath.* 1.20e.

¹⁴ *Plut. Mor.* 1142 b.

¹⁵ *Vit. Soph.* 3.

¹⁶ Lefkowitz (1981) 93–94.

¹⁷ *Paus.* 1.21.2; *Vit. Eur.* 4–7.

¹⁸ *Ar. fr.* 581 (1.540 Kock); *Schol. Ar. Vesp.* 462; *Schol. Soph. OC* 17. The honey-sweet voice of the poet is traditional (*Hom. Il.* 1.248–249), from which the biographer extrapolates halitosis for Euripides (*Vit. Eur.* 87–88).

¹⁹ *Vit. Soph.* 4.

²⁰ Fairweather (1974) 263; Kirk/Raven (1964) 4.

²¹ *Eust. Il.* 381.9, *Od.* 1553.63.

²² For the Stoa Poikile, see Camp (1986) 66–72.

²³ Fairweather (1984) 323.

Too little survives of *Thamyrias* to reconstruct its plot.²⁴ Given Sophocles' debt to Homer for inspiration and language, he may have followed the epic poet's version of the myth to include Thamyris' challenge to the Muses to a contest in singing:²⁵

[At] Dorion ... the Muses,
 encountering Thamyris of Thrace, made end to his singing
 as he was traveling from Oichalia and Oichalian Eurytos.
 He strutted and boasted that he would prevail even if
 the Muses, daughters of Zeus of the aegis, themselves should sing.
 The Muses, roused to anger, made him lame and, further, took away his
 marvellous
 singing and caused him to forget his craft with the cithara.

Pollux preserves under the rubric 'special masks' a detail of a tragic mask worn by an actor who was playing Thamyris. The mask had 'one grey eye and one black'.²⁶ The pioneering German literary critic, Gotthold Lessing, explained the convention of this mask by referring to a passage in Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*:²⁷

In comedies, the father whose role is important, because he is sometimes aroused and other times calm, has one eyebrow raised and the other in normal position. Actors customarily show that side as much as possible which agrees with the part they are acting at the time.

Since the actor could not change masks, Lessing reasoned, he would have held the black eye toward the audience while Thamyris was sighted, and the gray eye after he had been blinded. The actor may have been Sophocles, and his the embellishment of blindness. Whoever the author, he did not so much invent the blindness as bring to the surface an opposition latent in the mythmaking of the Muses' inspiration. Blindness is the price which the Muses exact from the innocent to use their gift and the punishment they impose upon anyone guilty of misusing that gift.

Tragedy at Athens belonged to the festival conducted annually during the month of Elaphebolion (February/March) in honour of Dionysus in the City. The democracy administered the presentation of plays as a contest among three tragedians and took pains to assure that the prize was fairly

²⁴ For the fragments, see Radt (1977, 1999²) 234–238.

²⁵ Hom. *Il.* 2.594–600. Bibliographers (*Vit. Soph.* 20) noticed Sophocles' use of Homeric language and plots.

²⁶ Poll. *Onom.* 4.141.

²⁷ Quint. *Inst.* 11.3.74; Lessing (1990; orig. 1760–1766) 291–292.

awarded. Its archon selected ten names from a list of those submitted by the ten tribes and based his decision upon the ballots of half of the judges on the final panel.²⁸ In 469/8 BC, competition was intense between Aeschylus and the youthful Sophocles. The spectators were aroused, and the archon Apsephion felt pressure. Then he espied his rescue. Plutarch relives for us that day in his *Cimon*:²⁹

Responding to the rivalry and partisanship among the spectators, the archon Apsephion did not choose the judges by lot for the contest. After Cimon entered the theatre with the other generals and offered the customary libations to the god, Apsephion did not let them leave. He bound them with an oath and forced them to sit down and make the judgement, since they were ten, one from each tribe. Because of the prestige of the judges, the rivalry in the contest was intensified. When Sophocles won

Apsephion did not break the rules for selecting judges; each of the ten judges was elected by his tribe. But he may have skewed them to favour Sophocles.

Triptolemus is accepted as Sophocles' first play, and the first which won him first prize in tragedy. According to the elder Pliny, in 469/8 BC, the year cited by the Parian Marble for his first victory, Sophocles praised Italy in *Triptolemus* for being 'white with white grain'.³⁰ Two of its longer fragments suggest a plot similar to that summarized by the Athenian mythographer Apollodorus.³¹ Demeter outfits Triptolemus of Eleusis with a winged chariot from which, high in the heavens, he sows the inhabited world with the goddess's wheat. The subject would have strongly appealed to an audience of Athenians and evidently struck a chord with them. They were familiar with the deeds of Triptolemus, since the mysteries at Eleusis had been part of their religious calendar since the seventh century. Sophocles, moreover, put into the form of his medium the claim, made by orators at public funerals for the war dead, that their land was the source of the fruits for mankind:³²

Our earth, moreover, did not begrudge her fruits but distributed them to others. After this, she produced for her sons the vine, relief from toils. Nurturing gods and bringing them to maturity, she brought them to men and teachers.

²⁸ Pickard-Cambridge (1968²) 95–98.

²⁹ Plut. *Cim.* 8.7.

³⁰ Plin. *NH* 18; Parian Marble 56; Lessing (1990; orig. 1760–1766) 287; Tyrrell (2006) 117–123.

³¹ Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.5.2; Soph. *Tript.* fr. 596 (Radt): 'Dragons holding astride the pole of the chariot with their coils'; fr. 598: 'Next after this, to the right of my hand, /all Oinotria and Tyrrenian Guld and the land of Liguria will receive you.'

³² Pl. *Menex.* 238 a.

The Athenians, who were growing in power and influence from the operations of their Delian League against the Persians, saw themselves and their land in the deeds of the goddess and her hero and rewarded Sophocles accordingly.³³ At the same time, this promotion of Athens propagandized the foreign policy that Cimon championed at home and abroad. Hence, T.B.L. Webster's suspicion of his influence thrown the way of a new voice for his Athens seems justified.³⁴ In turn, Cimon's influence may be felt in the selection of Sophocles as a cithara player on the Stoa Poikile. The original name of the porch, the Peisianaktios, recognized its builder, Peisianax, Cimon's brother-in-law.

With the rise of professional actors, Sophocles stopped performing and, like other dramatists, turned to hiring own actors. Biographers marked his retirement, namely the separation of the role of actor from that of the poet, as a first in the history of tragedy and attributed it to the weakness of his voice.³⁵ Sophocles was hardly the first poet to forego the actor's applause, but developments in tragedy were aptly, although not accurately, assigned to famous men. More likely responsible for the withdrawal of dramatists from acting were the rise of professional actors and the demands imposed by producing four plays. Sophocles remained popular with audiences and the deme's judges for the next six decades. He gained eighteen victories at the City Dionysia and, with the addition of those won at the Lenaea, a local Athenian festival of Dionysus, as many as twenty-four.³⁶ He escaped the ignominy of being relegated to third prize, although he may once have been refused a chorus, or so it seems from the contemporary comic poet Cratinus' chiding of the archon for preferring another tragedian.³⁷ His oeuvre consists of some 123 titles, but how many plays these represent is complicated by the propensity of grammarians and biographers to introduce their own titles.

When Sophocles next appears, it is the year 443/2 BC, and he is in the service of Athena as Hellenotamias, Treasurer of the Greeks. At fifty-five years, Sophocles surely was not engaged for the first time on behalf of the deme.

³³ For the early history of the Delian League, see Rhodes (1992²) 34–49.

³⁴ Webster (1936) 8–10.

³⁵ *Soph. Vit.* 4.

³⁶ *IG* II² 2325, an inscription listing victors in the City Dionysia, and Diodorus Siculus (13.103.4) set Sophocles' victories at 18. The *Suda*'s total of 24 (sigma 815) is thought to include six at the Lenaea. The *Life of Sophocles* (8) states 20 victories. See Schmid/Stählin (1959) 325. For a list of Sophocles' plays, see Pearson (1917) 3.190–191; von Blumenthal (1927) 1050–1079; Bates (1961) 164–281, who offers a useful overview of the lost plays drawn from Pearson.

³⁷ *Ath.* 14.638d.

Like Euripides,³⁸ he probably carried out liturgies, the funding at the individual's expense of public projects such as outfitting a trireme or producing a chorus for a festival. It would not have been as great a leap for an Athenian dramatist to participate in matters of the city as for a modern playwright to enter politics. The theatre was an institution of the democracy, and its plays promoted its interests. By the time Sophocles stood for election, he must have gained the confidence and respect of Athenians and their leader, Pericles. His was an elected office whose primary responsibility consisted of transferring to the Treasury of the Sacred Monies of Athena one sixtieth of the tribute collected that year from the allied cities of the Delian League. This board, however, was charged by Pericles with undertaking a new assessment one year in advance of the normally scheduled time. The records for these transactions, recorded on stone rather than wood, have preserved the spare notation as restored: '[S]ophocles from Kolo[nos, Hellenotami]as'.³⁹

The Athenians again entrusted Sophocles with public office when they elected him to the board of ten generals for 441/0 BC.⁴⁰ The upcoming year was supposed to be uneventful. Treaties with the Peloponnesians and Persians had secured the peace, and Athenian interests were prospering everywhere. Then in the winter of the year, war erupted between the Athenian allies, Samos and Miletus, centred on Priene, a city lying near Samian territory on the mainland.⁴¹ The Milesians, getting the worse of the fighting, appealed for arbitration to the Athenians as hegemon of the Delian League, and the Athenians sided with them against the independently minded Samian oligarchs. Pericles departed Athens immediately and quickly reduced the island to submission. But Samians escaped to the mainland where they obtained the aid of the Persian governor, Pisuthnes. Returning with a mercenary force, they reclaimed their home from the Athenian garrison and their city from the new democratic constitution. Pericles sailed again to Samos with Sophocles and the other generals. There ensued a war fought bitterly at sea that left Samos humbled and reduced to paying reparations for the war.

³⁸ Arist. *Rh.* 3.15.8.

³⁹ Meritt/Wade-Gery/McGregor (1940) 2.18 (list 12, line 36). Merritt (1959) 189 asserts, against Lewis' doubts (1955) 12–17, that the *phi* is visible on the stone and so the name of Sophocles has been correctly restored. He concludes that 'We are left the choice of taking the hellenotamias to be the poet, or another man of the same name.'

⁴⁰ Strabo 14.638c; Justin. *Hist. Philip.* 3.6.12; Schol. Aristid. 485.28 (Dindorff); *Vit. Soph.* 1.

⁴¹ For the Samian War, see Thuc. 1.115–117; Plut. *Per.* 25–28; Lewis (1992) 143–145.

Sophocles accomplished nothing significant militarily. He may have accompanied a squadron of ships to raise reinforcements around Lesbos and Chios.⁴² *Suda* reports that he fought a naval battle against Melissus.⁴³ Melissus, a philosopher and general of the Samians, persuaded the Samians to engage the Athenian fleet. At the time its strength had been weakened by Pericles' withdrawal of sixty ships in search of a Phoenician fleet feared to be sailing to aid the Samians.⁴⁴ Sophocles could have been weathering the blockade off Samos and found himself in battle. More likely, however, the biographers, knowing the name of no other general than that of the absent Pericles, assigned the defeat to him. Thus they gained the contest of two famous wise men, the philosopher and the tragedian. Similarly, fame for his Samian generalship led to the apparently mistaken assumptions in the tradition of a second or even a third generalship.⁴⁵

'Sophocles, they say, was deemed worthy of the generalship in Samos, because he distinguished himself in the production of the *Antigone*'.⁴⁶ So states an ancient introduction to *Antigone*, ascribed to Aristophanes of Byzantium, head of the library at Alexandria (ca. 194–80 BC), creating the most famous and notorious synchronicity in Greek tragedy. Aristophanes' observation assumes the sequence: production of the play, election to a generalship, Samian Revolt. The usual date for *Antigone*, the festival of 441 BC, depends upon the dates, both uncertain, of the elections of generals for 441/0 BC and the Samian Revolt.⁴⁷ On the other hand, Mary R. Lefkowitz points out that third-century writers lacked a fixed date for *Antigone*, and Aristophanes, writing yet later, 'might only have been making a logical conjecture'.⁴⁸

It is refreshing to come upon a part of Sophocles' life regarded as historical, his friendship with the traveller, Herodotus of Halicarnassus. Herodotus sojourned in Athens during the late 440s BC, and his *Histories* evince extensive knowledge of its local history. He read from his works throughout the city for which the Athenian *boulê* is said to have rewarded him, although

⁴² Thuc. 1.116.1.

⁴³ *Suda* mu 496.

⁴⁴ Plut. *Per.* 26.2–3.

⁴⁵ *Soph. Vit.* 1 and 9. Ehrenberg (1954) 117n1. For the view that 'Sophocles was general in one of the years in which Nicias was general, 426–423', see Webster (1936) 13.

⁴⁶ For a text, see Jebb (1900) 3–4 and Tyrrell (2006) for a translation.

⁴⁷ On the chronology of the Samian War, see Fornara/Lewis 1979; for an account of the war, see Lewis (1992) 143–145. For the dating of the *Antigone*, see Jebb (1900) xlii–xlv; Lloyd-Jones (1994a) 9.

⁴⁸ Lefkowitz (1981) 82.

likely not with the ten talents reported by Plutarch, a staggering sum tantamount to 60,000 days' pay for a skilled workman.⁴⁹ During his stay, Sophocles wrote an ode for Herodotus, whose epigram alone has survived: 'Sophocles at fifty-five years wrote an ode for Herodotus'.⁵⁰ Reminiscences of Herodotus' *Histories*, however, occur in the tragedian's *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, and both Oedipus plays,⁵¹ but none is as transparent as the response of Itaphernes' wife to the Persian king's question and Antigone's admission to the Thebans of the Chorus.⁵² In Herodotus' account, King Darius poses a choice for the wife of Itaphernes who has been condemned to death along with his children and male relatives: 'Woman, King Darius grants that you may save the one of your arrested kinsmen whom you wish'. She replies:

If the king gives me the life of one, I choose of them all my brother King, there may be another husband for me, and if heaven complies, other children, if I should lose these. But with my father and mother no longer living, there would not be another brother for me.

Antigone explains her willingness to die for a brother but not for husband or son:

Not even if I were the mother of children,
not if my husband were dead and rotting on me,
would I take up this task in violence of the citizens.
For the sake of what principle do I say this?
A husband dead, there would be another for me,
and a child from another man, if I lost this one.
But with my mother and father both hidden in the house of Hades,
there is no brother who would be produced, ever.
I honoured you, Polyneices, by such a principle.

The passage in *Antigone* has been reviled as unworthy of Sophocles. Goethe called for 'an apt philologist' to establish its illegitimacy.⁵³ Many have responded to his clarion but to no avail or agreement, while the presence of the passage in Aristotle's copy of the play has thwarted editors' daggers.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Euseb. *Chron.* 83.4; Plut. *Mor.* 862 b. For the method used to determine the value of ten talents, see Young (1985) 115–127.

⁵⁰ Plut. *Mor.* 785b. Schmid/Stählin (1959) 318 suggest that the poem was a *propemptikon* wishing Herodotus farewell on his voyage to Thurii.

⁵¹ Soph. *El.* 417–423 and Hdt. 1.108.1; *Phil.* 305–306 and Hdt. 1.32; *OT* 1528–1530 and 1.32.7; *OC* 698 and 8.55. For further examples, see Schmid/Stählin 318n3.

⁵² Soph. *Ant.* 905–912; Hdt. 3.119.3–4.

⁵³ Oxenford (1901) 227–228.

⁵⁴ Arist. *Rh.* 3.16.9. On the intertextuality between Sophocles' *Antigone* and Herodotus' *Histories*, see West (1999) 129–132 and Dewald/Kitzinger (2006) with bibliography.

Sophocles, no doubt, expected his audience to recall Herodotus' wife of Itaphernes, but to what purpose resists closure among modern readers.

Sophocles served in 412/1 BC on a committee of ten elderly commissioners (*probouloi*) who were 'to advise concerning the present circumstances as the occasion arose'.⁵⁵ Their appointment came as a reaction to the defeat in Sicily in the Autumn of 413 BC. Evidently, the Athenians wanted the steadiness, experience, and fiscal responsibility of years in the uncertainties of times ahead, for, indeed, the only known members of the commission were of advanced age. Hagnon, who had been a general in 440 and a founder of Amphipolis in 437, was in his seventies at the least,⁵⁶ and, if Aristotle is referring to the dramatist in the *Rhetoric*, as is generally agreed, Sophocles about eighty-three.⁵⁷

When Sophocles was asked by Peisander whether it seemed a good thing to him, as it did to his fellow committee members, to establish the Four Hundred, Sophocles replied, 'Why? Do these measures strike you as repugnant?' Peisander replied, 'Then you did things that were repugnant?' 'Yes,' admitted Sophocles, 'for there were no better alternatives.'

Aristotle uses the vignette to illustrate how to lessen the impact of an opponent's damaging question by including one's justification in the answer. Peisander was a major force in the dismantling of the laws of the democracy and erecting the oligarchy of the Four Hundred.⁵⁸ Whatever role Sophocles played in facilitating the oligarchy, it repelled him as a necessary evil.⁵⁹ Alan H. Sommerstein observes, however, that 'This episode does not appear to have dented his popularity (he won first prize, with *Philoctetes*, at the City Dionysia of 409, the first held after the restoration of the democracy)'.⁶⁰

Sophocles was an actor's playwright who learned the actor's craft and insecurities by acting. He was successful, and actors would have wanted to work with him. Tlepolemus often acted for him and, perhaps, Cleidemides.⁶¹ During this period, Sophocles tailored his plays to his actors' singing or speaking abilities. He added a third actor and increased the numbers of

⁵⁵ Thucydides 8.1.3, who describes the men as 'elderly'; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 29.1; Gomme/Andrewes/Dover (1981) 6–7.

⁵⁶ Thuc. 1.117.2, 4.102.3.

⁵⁷ *Rh.* 1.14.3 and 3.18.6.

⁵⁸ For an account of the Four Hundred, see Andrewes (1992) 474–479.

⁵⁹ Sophocles and Peisander, see Jameson (1971) 541–568 and for the events in the aftermath of the defeat in Sicily, see Markantonatos (2007) 13–15.

⁶⁰ Sommerstein (2006) xiii–xiv.

⁶¹ Schol. Ar. *Nub.* 1266, *Ra.* 791.

choristers from twelve to fifteen, thus allowing greater participation in a production.⁶² The advantage of playing a Sophoclean role continued even after the deme took over hiring and paying for professional actors and initiated a contest among the three protagonists. In fact, his predominance may have contributed to the change in the organization of this part of the festival.⁶³

Sophocles is also credited with inventions that helped shape the genre of tragedy. Ancient scholars, probably influenced by Aristotle's *Poetics*, believed that tragedy developed incrementally until it attained its mature and final form. They also held that notables of the genre contributed to its formation by innovations and combed sources on the genre and on inventions.⁶⁴ It is indicative of their preference for famous names that Diogenes Laertius rejects Aristotle's attribution of the invention of dialogue to the obscure Alexamenos of Styra or Teos in favour of Zeno the Eleatic.⁶⁵ Aristotle's authority secures the historicity of Sophocles' invention of the third actor.⁶⁶ Aristoxenus, who conducted research into music while a member of Aristotle's school, seems a reliable source for Sophocles' introduction of Phrygian melodies.⁶⁷ A corrupt line in *Suda* appears, to the satisfaction of most authorities, to credit Sophocles with giving up the tetralogy in favour of separate plays.⁶⁸ Other sources inspire less confidence. Satyrus of Callais Pontica, the authority for Sophocles' invention of the crooked staff, composed his life of Euripides from Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae*. Ister undermines his own statement that Sophocles introduced white boots for his choristers by asserting that the tragedian was not an Athenian.⁶⁹ Material of this sort, without bearing upon the historical Sophocles, contributes to the image of him created by later biographers. They imagine Sophocles as both an artist who produced the dramas of his craft and as an inventor who added to the form of tragedy itself. Their Sophocles is a culture hero whose actions changed the world by bringing tragedy to fruition.

Unlike Aeschylus and Euripides, Sophocles did not seek the patronage of foreign rulers, but instead spent his career in Athens. Out of this grew the

⁶² Arist. *Poet.* 1449a15; *Vit. Soph.* 4; Diog. Laert. 3.56.

⁶³ Arist. *Poet.* 1449a; Schol. Ar. *Nub.* 1266 and *Ra.* 791; *Vit. Soph.* 4, 6; Pickard-Cambridge (1968²) 93.

⁶⁴ Fairweather (1974) 264.

⁶⁵ Diog. Laert. 3.48.

⁶⁶ Arist. *Poet.* 1449a15.

⁶⁷ *Vit. Soph.* 23.

⁶⁸ *Suda* sigma 815; Pickard-Cambridge (1968²) 81n3; Tyrrell (2006) 165.

⁶⁹ *Vit. Soph.* 6.

tradition that he was a 'lover of Athens'.⁷⁰ He was alive for the Proagon in Elaphebolion of 406 BC, his ninetieth year.⁷¹ This festival, held in the Odeion on the day before the procession opening the City Dionysia, provided the three dramatists with an opportunity to announce to the public the subject of their plays and introduce their actors and choristers, garlanded but without masks and costumes. News had come recently from Macedonia of Euripides' death at the royal court. Sophocles, dressed in the dark cloak of mourning, led his bareheaded company into the Odeion, and all broke out in tears. Ten months later, when Aristophanes produced *Frogs* at the Lenaea held in Gamelion (January/February) of 405 BC, he was dead. Aristophanes depicts him in Hades just in time for the contest over the art of tragedy between Aeschylus and its new resident and challenger, Euripides. Dionysus' slave, Xanthus, and Pluto's doorman, Aeacus, discuss Sophocles' actions on arriving:⁷²

XANTHUS: Sophocles surely laid claim
to the Chair in Tragedy?

AEACUS: By Zeus, not that one. Instead, he kissed Aeschylus
when he came down, and took up his right hand.
He yielded the chair to Aeschylus.
He intends for the present, Cleidemides says, to sit
as an alternative. Should Aeschylus win,
he will keep his place, but if not, then he will
contend for his craft against Euripides to the end.

The author of the *Life of Sophocles* asserts that 'there was such charm to his personality that he was beloved by everyone everywhere'.⁷³ Aristophanes underscores his assessment with Dionysus' pronouncement: 'Sophocles was a satisfied man in life, and he is a satisfied man in Hades'.⁷⁴ This is the Sophocles of Phrynicus' obituary in *Muses*, second-place finisher to the *Frogs*:⁷⁵

Happy Sophocles, who lived a long time
and died a fortunate and clever man,
wrote many fine tragedies
and ended well without suffering any evil.

⁷⁰ *Vit. Soph.* 10.

⁷¹ *Marmor Parium* 64; Diod. Sic. 13.103.4; *Vit. Eur.* 44–47. For the Proagon, see Pickard-Cambridge (1968²) 63, 67–68.

⁷² *Ar. Ra.* 786–794.

⁷³ *Vit. Soph.* 7.

⁷⁴ *Ar. Ra.* 82: εὐκόλος, literally, having a good colon; thus, satisfied with one's food, good-natured, contented.

⁷⁵ *Argumentum* II to Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*.

On the other hand, the contest between Aeschylus, representative of the old ways, and Euripides, spokesman for the newfangled sophistry, leaves no place for a third contestant. So Aristophanes has Sophocles sit out the contest, an expedient perhaps forced upon him by Sophocles' sudden death. The exchange quoted above between Xanthus and Aeacus and the next line (795) may be omitted without loss of continuity.⁷⁶ The real Sophocles, of course, had to be competitive: he competed all his adult life in the tragic contests and surely expected to win each time he entered the fray—the timeless mentality of the successful athlete.

Biographers devised three forms of death for Sophocles. He choked to death on an unripe grape. He suffocated from breathlessness on reading *Antigone*. He expired from joy at the news of victory in tragedy. Lefkowitz observes that 'each of these deaths is particularly appropriate for a poet, but at the same time degrading'.⁷⁷ They seek to deny Sophocles' greatness and his connection with Dionysus, the god of his craft, and with his craft. Sophocles chokes on a grape, a fruit sacred to Dionysus. Similarly, Aeschylus dies when his head is crushed by a falling tortoise shell, the shell used to make lyres.⁷⁸ Both deaths imply the god's hostility toward the poet. Sophocles' death from the loss of breath and from joy attributes his demise to his craft, the very thing that made him Sophocles. These stories parallel those of athletes who, after remarkable careers in the Panhellenic games, commit transgressions. Cleomedes of Astypalaia slays his opponent in a boxing match, goes mad, and kills sixty boys in their school in his home town. Euthycles of Locri, a pentathlete, is executed wrongly for betraying an embassy for his city. Oebotas of Dyme, a sprinter, curses his fellow Achaeans to perpetual defeat at Olympia for not rewarding his victory in the games there. Theagenes of Thasos, winner of over a thousand victories, cheated in a contest, was fined, and his image cast into the sea after it killed a man.⁷⁹ The poets, not men of violence like athletes, suffer as deeply by having their god and their craft turned against them as the athlete's strength and prowess are turned against him. Lefkowitz explains: 'The explanation lies once again in the Greeks' ambivalent attitude toward extraordinary achievement. A great man, envied, hated, and feared at the height of his power, becomes loved and respected once he has fallen'.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Sommerstein (1996a) 20–21.

⁷⁷ Lefkowitz (1981) 86.

⁷⁸ *Vit. Aesch.* 10–12.

⁷⁹ Fontenrose (1968) 73–76.

⁸⁰ Lefkowitz (1981) 96–97.

During his lifetime Sophocles was known for his piety, and after his death, his reputation fostered stories. Heracles appeared in a dream to reveal to him the whereabouts of a golden crown stolen from the Acropolis:⁸¹

Heracles told him to look for a house on his right as he was walking where the crown had been hidden. He revealed the crown to the deme and received a talent, the reward decreed before this event. He took the talent and founded a shrine for Heracles the Revealer.

The episode encapsulates the hero's respect for Sophocles, while Sophocles' expenditure of the gold underscores the piety that attracted Heracles' attention.⁸²

The vision that advised Sophocles to act as host for Asclepius may be more than a biographer's fancy.⁸³ Asclepius came to Athens from Epidaurus, his major centre in southern Greece, in 420/19 BC during a lull in the hostilities between the cities secured by the Peace of Nicias. According to a fourth-century inscription, Telemachus arranged Asclepius' journey:⁸⁴

Having come from Zea,
at the time of the Great Mysteries,
he put in [at the Eleusinion],
and summoning from home a serpent,
he brought it here on a chariot
of Telemachos
.... At the same time came Hygieia
and thus this whole temple was founded
in the archonship of Astyphilos of Kydantidai

Robert Parker suggests that the unknown subject of 'put in' is Telemachus, since 'by analogy with similar accounts, the mortal should be subject of the verb, not the god'.⁸⁵ 'Home' could be the serpent's home in the shrine of Asclepius in the Piraeus where lay the harbor of Zea. In this case, Telemachus would have been an Athenian, but if home is Epidauris, then, as Parker suggests, Telemachus would be an Epidaurian.⁸⁶ The new god in the form of a serpent came to Athenians on a chariot, presumably drawn by

⁸¹ *Vit. Soph.* 12.

⁸² *Vit. Soph.* 12.

⁸³ *Plut. Mor.* 1103a and *Num.* 4.8; *Etym. Magn.* 256.6. For Asclepius, see Edelstein/Edelstein 1945; Parke (1977) 63–65; Garland (1992) 116–135; Parker (1996) 175–185; Clay (2004) 78–80; Markantonatos (2007) 15–17.

⁸⁴ *IG II²* 4960a.

⁸⁵ Parker (1996) 178.

⁸⁶ Parker (1966) 178 and n89.

horses in much the same way as his advent among the Sicyonians which is brought about, it is worth noting, by a citizen of Sicyon:⁸⁷

The Sicyonians say that the god was conveyed to them from Epidaurus on a wagon drawn by a brace of mules. The god took the shape of a serpent, and Sicyonian Nicagora, mother of Agasikles and wife of Echetimos, brought him.

The deity was accompanied by his daughter Hygieia (Health), perhaps represented by her cult statue. Father and daughter arrived on the eighteenth of Boedromion (August/September), the fourth day of the celebration of the Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone. The construction of a precinct for Asclepius, overseen and funded by Telemachus and later embellished by him with a monument to this exploit, had been delayed by a suit over the site.⁸⁸ The new gods had to be housed temporarily in the shrine of Eleusinian Demeter on the northwest slope of the Acropolis. For this, devotees of Asclepius undoubtedly had the co-operation of the priests of Demeter. The goddesses' Holy Things were still in the shrine, awaiting their escort by procession back to Eleusis on the nineteenth. On this day, the *Mystai* (initiates) were sequestered inside houses across Athens, collecting and preparing themselves for the procession on the following day and the revelations that climaxed the initiation on the twentieth. The god's timing later became the *aition* ('reason') for a festival, the Epidauria, that readied late-comers to the mysteries for its final days.⁸⁹

Among the devotees welcoming the god was Sophocles, who received the serpent into his home and founded an altar, perhaps in his house.⁹⁰ 'It was doubtless more convenient for Sophocles to tend the serpent of Asclepius in his own house, offering it sustenance and an altar, than in the precinct of Amynos'.⁹¹ W.S. Ferguson goes on to imagine the scene:⁹²

It is a precious detail to find the idol of the Athenians, then a genial, serene, dignified gray-beard, conversant with, but untroubled by, the moral and religious contradictions of his great age, doling out eggs to a sacred snake and sacrificing cocks to Asklepios on a domestic altar.

⁸⁷ Paus. 2.10.3; Ferguson (1944) 88–89.

⁸⁸ For the Telemachus monument, see Beschi (1967–1968) 381–438 and (1982) 31–42, who claims that Sophocles was depicted on one panel; Mitropoulou 1975; Garland (1992) 118–121.

⁸⁹ Parke (1977) 64–65.

⁹⁰ *Ety. Magn.* 256.6; Körte (1896) 281–332; Parker (1996) 185n115.

⁹¹ Ferguson (1944) 90.

⁹² Ferguson (1944) 90.

Parker notes the irony 'it was Sophocles, in his works "the last great exponent of the archaic world-view", who received this harbinger of the Hellenistic age in his house'.⁹³

The tragedian's hospitality has been doubted, at least the part about the serpent.⁹⁴ But the serpent embodied and symbolized Asclepius' godhead which Sophocles evidently accepted.⁹⁵ The *Life* reports that he belonged to the priesthood of the hero and healer Halon or Alon who was himself connected with the god.⁹⁶ Sophocles wrote a paean in honour of Asclepius.⁹⁷ After Sophocles' death, Athenians recognized his piety toward Asclepius by extending him honours as a hero under the name of Dexion, Receiver, and offering yearly sacrifices.⁹⁸ Two inscriptions found on the south slope of the Acropolis testify to the historicity of the shrine and cult of the healing god Amynos, Asclepius, and Dexion.⁹⁹ Both inscriptions record the awards given to worthy patrons of the gods, and one, in exempting the benefactors and their descendants from having to pay for liquid offerings 'in both sacrifices' and in directing the erection of 'one [stone pillar] in the shrine of Dexion and the other in the shrine of Amynos and Asclepius', indicates that the shrine and cult of Dexion were separate from those of the others.¹⁰⁰

According to Plutarch, 'The story is that Asclepius stayed with Sophocles as his guest while Sophocles was alive, many proofs of which still remain, and that when Sophocles died, another god, it is said, took care of his burial'.¹⁰¹ Plutarch's 'many proofs' seem clarified,¹⁰² while the god in question can only be Dionysus. In dreams, Dionysus is said to have twice warned Lysander, the Lacedaemonian general overseeing the blockade of Athens in 405 BC, to allow the 'man' to be buried. Lysander, aroused by the god's second epiphany, inquired who had died and, learning that it was Sophocles, allowed him to be placed in his paternal tomb. The story illustrates the

⁹³ Parker (1996) 185; the quotation is from Dodds (1964) 49.

⁹⁴ Garland (1992) 125.

⁹⁵ Garland (1992) 121–122.

⁹⁶ *Vit. Soph.* 11: Halon, a hero who with Asclepius stands at the side of Chiron.

⁹⁷ *IG II²* 4510 for which see Oliver (1936) 112. For a translation, see Tyrrell (2006) 169.

⁹⁸ *Vit. Soph.* 17, *Etym. Magn.* 256.6, Beschi (1967–1968) 424–428, who identifies the reclining figure on the Telemachus monument as Sophocles. For the view that heroic honours for Sophocles Dexion is a biographical fiction, see Connolly (1998) 1–21, and Lefkowitz (1981) 84, who points out that 'in actual cult practice adult heroes are worshipped under their own names and do not acquire new identities'.

⁹⁹ *IG II/III²* 1252 and 1253, Ferguson (1944) 87–91. For translations, see Tyrrell (2006) 97–98.

¹⁰⁰ *IG II/III²* 1252.

¹⁰¹ *Plut. Num.* 4.8.

¹⁰² The location of the sanctuary of Dexion, however, remains uncertain.

care the gods extended to Sophocles even in death.¹⁰³ But, as it happened, Lysander arrived at Athens in September 405 BC and had the city blockaded by the end of the month. By then, Sophocles had been entombed since March, 406 at the earliest and January, 405 at the latest. The details of his father's tomb, 'on the road to Decelea about two kilometres from the city', betray the tour guide's need for an attraction, while the epigram claimed to have been written on it—'I am concealing by this tomb Sophocles who took first place in the tragic arts, a most august figure'—evinces the biographer's standard method for closing off the account of a life'.¹⁰⁴

Sophocles' son, Iophon, by the Athenian Nicostrate, and his like-named grandson became tragedians. Gossips made out that Iophon plagiarized his father's work. Aristophanes, not above invective for its own sake, insinuated as much by Dionysus' insistence on waiting to see how Iophon works out in Sophocles' absence.¹⁰⁵ Iophon carried his own weight, however, winning a first in the tragic contest of 435 BC and a second in 428 BC and producing in all about fifty plays.¹⁰⁶ Webster concludes from Aristophanes' insinuations that 'father and son were working happily together till the end'.¹⁰⁷ Iophon may have followed his father in death soon afterwards, a circumstance that explains why the younger, less experienced Sophocles produced *Oedipus at Colonus*.¹⁰⁸ It is unclear whether this Sophocles was Iophon's son or the son of Ariston, Sophocles' late-in-life son by the Sicyonian Theoris.¹⁰⁹

Scholars have noticed coincidences between Sophocles' interest in heroes and reception of Asclepius, and features of the plot of *Oedipus at Colonus*. Lowell Edmunds points out that 'The structure of reception, the founding of a new cult, is what *Oedipus at Colonus* "repeats" from Sophocles' own life. In this very general way, the tragedy was autobiographical'.¹¹⁰ As chance would have it, its conflict between Oedipus and his sons offered biographers an opportunity too enticing to be resisted. Here is Cicero's version:¹¹¹

¹⁰³ Plin. *NH* 7.109; *Vit. Soph.* 15, 16; Paus. 1.21.1.

¹⁰⁴ Lefkowitz (1981) 86; Fairweather (1974) 254.

¹⁰⁵ *Ar. Ra.* 78–79.

¹⁰⁶ Schol. *Ar. Ra.* 78; *Suda* iota 451; *Arg. II Eur. Hipp.*

¹⁰⁷ Webster (1936) 15.

¹⁰⁸ *Arg. II Soph. OC*, Sommerstein (1996a) 163.

¹⁰⁹ Von Blumenthal (1927) 1042; Schmid/Stählin (1959) 321; Lesky (1966) 275. On the other hand, Webster (1936) 15 insists that 'The only members of the Sophocles' family for whom there is any evidence are Iophon and Iophon's son the younger Sophocles.'

¹¹⁰ Edmunds (1996) 164–168; the quotation appears on p. 164.

¹¹¹ *Cic. Sen.* 22.

Sophocles composed tragedies until extreme old age. Because of this pursuit, he seemed to neglect his family's affairs and was summoned into court by his sons so that the judges could remove him from his family estate for incompetence Then the old man is said to have read aloud to the judges that play which he held in his hands and which he had written most recently, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and asked them whether it seem to be the song of an incompetent. After it was read aloud, Sophocles was acquitted by the decision of the judges.

This vein, perhaps beginning with a comedy about Sophocles' family, was long-lived and vigorous.¹¹²

Ion recalls in his *Sojournings*, a memoir of visits by the rich and famous to Ion's Chios, a party at the house of Hermisilaus, the local representative of Athenian interests.¹¹³ Pericles and Socrates attended probably while they were trolling for ships during the Samian War. Sophocles, attracted to the boy who poured the wine, enticed him to bring the cup closer to his lips. When they were in range, Sophocles embraced and kissed him:

Everyone rippled with laughter and shouts of glee over how Sophocles led on the boy. 'I am practicing my generalship, gentlemen, since Pericles said that I know how to write poetry but not how to be a general. Didn't this piece of generalship come out aright for me?'

Ion, himself a frequent sojourner at Athens and tragedian, first produced plays for the City Dionysia in 451.¹¹⁴ Ion surely formed his opinion of the man first hand: 'Sophocles was neither wise nor active in the affairs of the city, but he conducted himself as one of the useful¹¹⁵ Athenians.' The evidence, as we have seen, supports Ion's estimation. Sophocles remained a poet, but when Athenians called upon him to serve, he repeatedly proved his usefulness.

¹¹² Plut. *Mor.* 785a; Apul. *Apol.* 37; [Luc.] *Macrob.* 24; *Vit. Soph.* 13; Lefkowitz (1981) 85.

¹¹³ Ath. 13.603e–604f.

¹¹⁴ Ion lost to Euripides' *Hippolytus* in 428 BC (*Argumentum* to Euripides' *Hippolytus*) but later gained a victory in tragedy and dithyramb (*Suda* iota 487). Overwhelmed with joy, he gave every Athenian citizen a jar of Chian wine (*Suda* alpha 731; iota 487).

¹¹⁵ Χρηστός, literally 'useful', 'good', denotes the social values of Sophocles' 'social class' and not those of morality (Lloyd-Jones 1994a, 12).

TEXT AND TRANSMISSION

Guido Avezzù

We have a lot of pieces to fit together and
make patterns with, but we do not know
the shape or dimensions of the mosaic ...

P.E. Easterling*

From Athens to Alexandria. At the time of Aristophanes' *Frogs*, the canonical triad of the fifth-century tragedians was already established, but the *corpora* of tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides became a true theatrical repertory only after the City Dionysia of 386 BC, when 'the *tragôdoi* began to stage an old tragedy out of competition'.¹ Some surviving records, from Athens as well as from outside the city, attest revivals of the tragedies that were regarded as classics. Although fragmentary, this documentation reliably reflects the taste that had become apparent by the fourth century, and which was shared by Hellenism: Aeschylus was neglected, and apart from some of Sophocles' individual tragedies (such as *Ant.* and *Oenomaus*) and perhaps even a Telephus trilogy (probably *The Sons of Aleus*, *The Mysians*, *Eurypylos*) that were still performed,² Euripides was the favourite author both in Athens and in the rest of the Hellenized world.

References in the *Corpus Aristotelicum* seem to confirm this situation. Frequent quotations from Euripides were likely to be more easily understood by the school audience because his plays were more frequently performed: both in *Rhetoric* and in *Poetics* plays are cited that will be part of the commented selection (*Hec.*, *Or.*, *Med.*, *Hipp.*, *Tr.*), and others later transmitted by the 'alphabetic' corpus (*IA* and *IT*), as well as a large number of lost plays (*Andromed.*, *Antiop.*, *Cresph.*, *Phil.*, *Melanippe Soph.*, *Meleag.*, *Oin.*, *Sthen.*, *Thy.*, *Tel.*)—but *Pho.* is completely missing: a fact that suggests that

* Easterling (2006a) 1.

¹ *IG* II² 2318 (= *TrGF* I, DID A 1), ll. 201–203.

² *IG* II² 3091 (= *TrGF* I, DID B 5), l. 8 (380, Attica or Athens): 'Sophocles produced a trilogy about Telephos'; Sophocles the Younger (*TrGF* I 62) is likely to have been the *didaskalos* of his grandfather's trilogy, if he is not the author of a new one.

this play had been appreciated as a condensation of the final episodes of the Theban saga only later. Agathon, Carcinus II, and Theodectes are quoted alongside Euripides. Aristotle cites from Sophocles' *Ant.* and *OT*, and just once from *EL.*, and, with regard to Sophocles' lost dramas, he quotes from *Tereus*, *Teucer*, and *Tyro* (we do not know from which of the two with this title), and he possibly makes reference to *Those Who Dine Together* and *Odysseus Wounded by the Spine*.

As for the staging of Sophocles' dramas: *Epigoni* was performed by an actor Andronicos at the end of the fourth century BC,³ *Oenomaus* was staged in Collytos (Dem. 18.180, cf. *TrGF* IV 381), and *Ant.* was performed several times in Athens (Dem. 19.246). Plutarch tells us that Alexander's treasurer Harpalos sent books of the three major tragedians to the king 'in the interior of Asia', and also that 'the children of the Persians learned to chant the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides' as part of a widespread Hellenization of those regions. It is not unlikely that these were actually staged performances.⁴ We know from Cicero *ad Quint.* fr. 2.16.3 about a performance of *Those Who Dine Together* in 54 BC in Rome. More generally, see Holford-Strevens (1999) and Hall (2002) 25 about the presence of Sophocles in Roman culture.

The notion of a permanent repertory assumes a text that has a fixed written form, accessible also for individual reading, as Aristotle reminds us (*Poet.* 1462a11–14). The typology of books containing the texts of the tragedies is various: copies deposited with the eponymous archon and then incorporated into the city archive are complemented by books for individual use that circulated in the book market (such as the copy of Euripides' *Andromeda* read by Dionysus in Aristophanes, *Frogs* 52–53), and by those retained by the authors or their heirs.⁵ Occasionally, the texts of dramas by important authors were adapted, or if they were incomplete or judged to be unsatisfactory and therefore set aside, they could be significantly rewritten in order to be presented again: Euphorion, son of Aeschylus, won four times with his father's unpublished plays;⁶ Euripides the Younger mounted some of his father's unpublished works, including *IA*; Sophocles, son of Ariston, staged his grandfather's unpublished *OC* in 401 BC and won seven times

³ Athen. 13 584 D.

⁴ Plut. *Alex.* 668 *De Alex. fort.* 328 D.

⁵ Cf. Easterling (1997d) 216–217; Sutton (1987).

⁶ *Suda* ε 3800 (= *TrGF* I 12 T1, 1–3 = III, T71). There seem to have been a large number of stagings of unpublished works by Aeschylus, as the *polis* encouraged performances of his work even before 386 BC.

with his own dramas.⁷ Aristophanes comments ironically on Iophon, soon after the death of Sophocles (*Frogs* 73–79: ‘Iophon is the only good thing left, if he’s good at all. I do not even know for sure if that’s the case ... not before I take Iophon aside all by himself, and test what he does without Sophocles’), suggesting both the collaboration between father and son, and Iophon’s use of his father’s unpublished work while he was still alive, or his use of works recovered shortly after Sophocles’ death.⁸

The *palaià dramata* did not compete in dramatic festivals, yet the actors did, and this involves the risk that the texts could have been adapted according to skills and weaknesses of the performers. In addition, the staging was subject to practical constraints, and convenience could lead the *didaskalos* to change the lines or to introduce new ones.⁹ Theodoros, one of the most famous actors of the fourth century BC, could not tolerate the idea of a colleague coming onstage before him (Arist. *Pol.* 1336b28–31), therefore, as to the Sophoclean repertory, he was comfortable with *Ant.*, one of his *tour de force* performances, but not with *Phil.*, the prologue of which starts with the *tritagonistēs* who impersonates Odysseus. Even if we do not take the ancient anecdotes literally, it is clear that the instability of the dramatic text is to some extent determined by the rising importance of the role of the actors, and by the increasingly widespread practice of extracting single passages that exalted their virtuoso and expressive qualities.¹⁰

In order to guarantee textual authenticity, the statesman Lycurgus (in power from 338 to 326 BC) promoted what has sometimes been interpreted as the national edition of the texts of the three major tragedians. In fact, evidence from the pseudo-Plutarch’s *Lives of the Ten Orators* does not indicate any criteria for selection from the various copies in circulation, nor for the restoration of texts that already showed marks of numerous and significant changes. Yet the textual purpose was not intended to fulfil philological procedures: rather than an edition based on embryonic philological

⁷ *TrGF* I 62 TT1, 3, 5, 6.

⁸ *Schol.* V Ar. *Ran.* 73 (T64); *Schol.* E *ad l. l.* (T63).

⁹ Nervegna (2007) 17: ‘reperformances, unlike performances of new plays, clearly put actors in the spotlight’. As for the limits of the actors, the intervention in Eur. *Or.* 1366–1368 is not very different from that aimed at facilitating Richard Burbage in the second *Hamlet* (V. 2).

¹⁰ On actor’s interpolations, after Cantarella (1930) and Page (1934), see e.g. Hübner (1997); Most (2002); Kovacs (2007); reservations in Hamilton (1974), but also cf. Battezzato (2003a). On the performance of texts outside dramatic contests, the process by which ‘one performance medium might modulate into another’ (Easterling 2006a, 2), see Hall (2002); Hunter (2002); Fassino (2003); Prauscello (2003); Gentili (2006²); Nervegna (2007).

criteria, the measure taken by Lycurgus seems to promote the restoration of the official version for the public archive as part of a series of measures with mainly honorific purposes.¹¹ Therefore, it is possible that state intervention ended up giving credibility to texts which had already been manipulated and emended, and that the Lycurgus' 'edition' is in fact the result of a number of different sources: surviving archive material, scripts directly belonging to the authors and others used for performances, and versions distributed by *scriptoria* and dating back to the authors but contaminated with variants introduced as a result of subsequent performances. Premises for critical work on the tragic texts are rather to be found in the work of Aristotle and his school. As is known, Aristotle gathered extensive documentation on dramatic competitions, and even more importantly, established a large library—a model for the library in Alexandria (Strabo 13.1.54).¹² Philological work on the text of tragedies was only to begin in Alexandria, but access to a large library made it possible to carry out significant research about tragedies in Athens already from the middle of the fourth century BC.

We are informed about the existence of monographs by Heracleides Ponticos (ca. 390–ca. 310) *On the Three Tragic Poets* and *On Euripides' and Sophocles' Stories* (T151–152), by Duris (fourth-third century: *On Euripides and Sophocles* [T150]) and Philochoros (ca. 340–ca. 260: *On Sophocles' Stories* [T149]). But it is not known whether Chamaeleon (ca. 350–ca. 275), who was the author of texts on archaic tragedy and on satyr plays, concerned himself directly with Sophocles. Among Aristotle's disciples, Dicaearchos (ca. 350–ca. 285) devised short information sheets (*hypotheses*) for Sophocles' and Euripides' dramas and promoted the reorganization of the Sophoclean *corpus* (T153). Dicaearchos (D.) dealt with questions of attribution by considering linguistic aspects and with knowledge of manuscript circulation: there is evidence related to *Rhesus* (fr. 81 Wehrli), which soon became part of the Euripides' collection,¹³ and it is likely that he dealt with Sophocles; we know, for example, that he gave *Aj.* the title *Αἴαντος θάνατος* (*The Death of Ajax*) (fr. 79 W.). It is plausible that the *hypotheses* contained not only information about the plot, as reported by the source (fr. 78 W.),¹⁴ but also news about the performance, drawn from the collection of *didaskaliai* gathered

¹¹ (Ps.)Plut. *Moralia* 841f; Battezzato's comments are significant (2003a, 10–19), also in the light of Dué's considerations (2001, 368–375).

¹² Cf. Richardson (1994).

¹³ See Liapis (2001).

¹⁴ Cf. Haslam (1975) 152–155.

by Aristotle: indeed, D. (fr. 80 W.) provided news about the failure of *OT* (T39) which was later taken up by Aelius Aristides. The attribution of the third actor to Sophocles (fr. 76 W.) confirms the Aristotelian source of D.'s information (cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1449a15 e T98).

Philochoros (4th–3rd cent. BC) wrote about Sophocles and Euripides, and in relation to Sophocles there remains the title of his extensive work on the plots of the tragedies (test. 1 Jacoby: Περὶ τῶν Σοφοκλέους μύθων βιβλία ε'). A *Life of Sophocles* used in the compilation of the anonymous *genos* may be attributed to Istros the Callimachean (*floruit* 250–220 BC), who was not a philologist but an antiquarian¹⁵ (evidence from Istros can be found in T1 2, 7, 16, 27, 55, 74).¹⁶ The biography of Sophocles written by Satyros (3rd–2nd cent. BC, T148) was characterized by the stratification of erudite information, ultimately going back to Aristotle, and of anecdotes of little documentary value.

It is possible that the official texts, which Lycurgus saved from direct reuse and from directorial alterations, coincide with those *palaia biblia* that Ptolemaeus III (Euergetes I, 247–222 BC) apparently obtained by deceit from the Athenians, as narrated by Galen (*in Hippocr. Epid. III Comm.* 2.4 = T157).¹⁷ We owe the arrangement of the tragic *corpora* to the contribution of the philologist-librarians (and sometimes poets) of Alexandria: the retrieval of the books, the canon of authors, the cataloguing and authentication of texts were preliminaries to later steps, from the interpretation of the *archaia graphê* (in the case of samples written in Attic alphabet, see the observation of the *scholium ad Eur. Phoen.* 682) to the recognition of errors in copying.

While Zenodotos (*floruit* ca. 280 BC) concerned himself principally with Homer, we owe the *diorthosis* of the tragic poets to his contemporary Alexander Aetolos,¹⁸ of which, however, only a few evanescent traces concerning Euripides remain (frr. 22–23 M.). We owe the definition of the Sophoclean *corpus* to Callimachus' (310–ca. 240 BC) *Pinakes* and to the revision that Aristophanes of Byzantium (257–ca. 180 BC) made of them. The *genos* points out that Aristophanes considered 17 (T1 18: ιζ') out of 130 (ρλ') plays attributed at the time to Sophocles to be spurious. Still, *Suda* c 815 mentions

¹⁵ *FGrHist* 334 + Suppl. Bd I 618–627; cf. Pfeiffer (1968) 150–151.

¹⁶ Jacoby (1916); Berti (2009) 26–27. According to Jacoby, the biographic information on Sophocles does not come from *De tragoedia* of the otherwise unknown Istros of Kallatis. However, the antiquarian information that inspires the *scholia* to *OC* (ll. 42, 57, 681, 701, 1053 e 1059) derives from the *Atthis* of the Callimachean.

¹⁷ Battezzato's reservations here are appropriate (2003a, 19–25).

¹⁸ Alexander Aet. test. 7 Magnelli = TT 158a–b.

123 (ρκγ') plays, but declares that there were 'many more of them, according to other scholars'; hence Bergk (1858) xxxix proposed emending the ιζ' of the *genos* to ζ'. It is worth noting that MS Laur. C.S. 152 (G, dated 1282) reformulated this section of the *genos* as follows (without any trace of corrections): 'according to Aristophanes he wrote 17 (ιζ') plays, but 7 (ζ') of them are spurious'; maybe this was a clumsy patch in the place of a longer wording, but we need in any case to bear in mind the seven false attributions.

On the authentication of the *corpus*, and on the production of *hypotheses* (in Sophocles, to *Ant.* and *OT*), Aristophanes of Byzantium continues within the same framework of Dicaearchos, and we may also owe him an edition of the Sophoclean text. Regarding Aristophanes and Alexander Aetolos before him, it is not clear how we should take these 'revisions' or 'editions' into account, although presumably they were a collection of variants and marginal notes attached to a conservative *textus receptus*; nor it is possible to determine to what extent they influenced the transmission of the text.¹⁹ However, we must observe that tragic papyri, as well as the Homeric ones, from after the middle of the second century BC show a less differentiated text than the older Ptolemaic findings, when compared with the Byzantine tradition. This phenomenon is fairly conspicuous for Euripides,²⁰ and it is a sign of the stable influence exercised by the Museum of Alexandria.

Traces of Aristophanes' critical work on Sophocles remain on the margins of the papyri: *Trach.* (POxy 1805, II–III): l. 744 ἀνθρώπων: -ου codd.; *Ichn.*, F314 (POxy 1174, second century AD): l. 79 (col. III 20) ε[ύθ]θυντήριε vel ε[ιθ]-: ιθ- pap.; l. 143 (VI 5) 'κπλαγέντες: πλ- pap.; l. 144 (VI 8) ἐκμεμαγμένα: -οι pap.; probably also at l. 221 (IX 6) χῶρον: πάγον pap. (unless this reading is to be attributed to Nicander or Nicanor); *Inc. fab.* F730e (*Theseus?*; POxy 2452, second century AD): fr. 2.16 (unless Aristarchos is to be credited with this reading). Probably also Aristarchos of Samothrace (ca. 220–143) wrote a commentary on Sophocles,²¹ of which little remains, and Didymos (who was active in the second half of the first century AD)²² wrote another. The essay *On Sophocles' Plagiarism* by a certain Philostratos of Alexandria concerned the misappropriation of themes and plots belonging to others by the poet of Colonus, rather than the authentication of the Sophoclean *corpus*: from

¹⁹ See Montanari (1994), *Discussion* about Irigoin (1994) 85.

²⁰ Fassino (2003) 56.

²¹ Pfeiffer (1968) 223.

²² Pfeiffer (1968) 277.

a citation in P.S.I. 1287 (second century AD), rr. 3–9 = *TrGF* II 722c and testt. 154a–b, we learn that *Nauplius Lights a Fire* (FF 429–431) is apparently not by Sophocles.²³

1. *The Papyri and the Text of Sophocles*

Our information on the distribution of the tragic texts in Hellenistic era and Late Antiquity derives mostly from Egyptian papyri,²⁴ and this may tend to make us Alexandria-centric, a preconception against which Jean Irigoin and Patricia Easterling have rightly warned us.²⁵ But information on the Greek motherland is very limited, except for an inscription found in Piraeus dated around 100 BC, which documents the spread of Sophocles' work shortly after the Roman conquest. This inscription contains a catalogue of books owned by an association of ephebes, including some Sophoclean titles apparently arranged neither in alphabetic nor in thematic order; we can definitely recognize *Amphiaraos*, *EL.*, *The Mysians*, *The Muses*, *Alexander*, *The Ethiopians*, *Iphigeneia*, and *Hipponous*, as well as other uncertain or obscure indications, such as the satyr play *Heracles* or *The Infant Heracles*.²⁶

In order to assess the circulation of Sophocles' text in Ptolemaic, Roman and proto-Byzantine Egypt, it is useful to take the spread of Euripides' texts as an element of comparison. The Euripidean papyrus findings are many more than those of the other tragic poets, and the greater proportion of Euripidean texts that were transmitted intact from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages (19 out of 92, versus 7 out of 113, 123 or 130 for Sophocles) attests to a more continuous presence of identifiable Euripidean findings from the third century BC to the sixth century AD.

The Egyptian findings belonging to the 'alphabetic' collection (fragments from *Cyc.*, *EL.*, *Hel.*, *HF*, *IA*, *Ion*, and *IT* are preserved), which from the second century BC onwards are always a minority and exclusively on scrolls, drastically decrease in the third and fourth centuries AD and disappear completely by the fifth century AD.²⁷ The plays of the selection with *scholia* (papyri preserve pieces of all of them) are the majority from the second century BC

²³ See S. Perrone's record in *LGGA*; P.S.I. 1287 attributes this information to the '33rd book', but evidence from Porphyrius *apud* Eusebius *Praep. ev.* 10.3.13 (Φιλόστρατος ... πραγματείαν κατεβάλετο: 'Philostratus ... began a treatise') suggests that the part dedicated to Sophocles is only a section of a much extensive discussion of the matter.

²⁴ Updated documentation in *MP*³. Other data in *LDAB*.

²⁵ Irigoin (1994) 73; Easterling (2006a) 3.

²⁶ *IG* II/III² 2363 (= *TrGF* I CAT B1); Luppe (1987); Ebert (1987).

²⁷ A phenomenon already observed by Cavallo (1986) 110–111.

onwards and they are documented by findings dated up to the sixth century AD, from the end of the fourth century only in codices. Evidence of plays which have not survived, some in codex already in the third century AD, and *only* in codex from the fifth century, diminishes gradually after a peak in the second century AD, to only single findings for the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries AD. It is conceivable that the Euripidean findings of the fifth and sixth centuries, both those of lost plays and those containing texts belonging to the annotated selection, form part of publishing projects which include the entire *corpus*, which may even be ordered alphabetically. However, statistical observations are significant and appear to testify in favour of a selection which, by the second century BC, was oriented towards some very popular dramas which were going to become dominant, first thanks to the availability of *hypomnemata*, and then because of marginal *scholia*. By contrast, at the same time the *corpus* arranged in alphabetical order was preserved, first on rolls and then transposed into codices, in different areas from those subject to the Alexandrian cultural hegemony, demonstrating a preference for the entire work of Euripides frustrated only by the accidents of tradition.

The Egyptian findings of Sophocles, fewer than those of Euripides,²⁸ brought to light about 450 lines of the satyr play *Ichneutae* (*The Searchers*, in *POxy* 1174 + 2081[a], second century AD); we owe about 130 lines of *Inachus* (another satyr play) to P. Tebt. 692 (second century BC) and *POxy* 2369 (first century BC–first century AD). Also from Oxyrhynchus we have *TrGF* IV, F730a–g (*POxy* 2452, second century AD), a *liber doctus* with *scholia* and corrections, written by copyist A24 Johnson (see *infra*): about 380 seriously damaged lines, which come from a *Theseus* by Sophocles or Euripides (but also other playwrights have been proposed). Then, this is the situation (the reliability of the table is conditioned by the limited number of findings):

Table 1. Distribution of Sophoclean findings from the third century BC to the sixth century AD.

century	III	II	I	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
roll	5	1	2	2	13	6			
codex							2	2	2
from the selected plays			1	1	5	2	2	2	2
from other plays	5	1	1	1	8	4			
total	5	1	2	2	13	6	2	2	2

²⁸ Cf. Daris (2003); Gammacurta (2006); Savignago (2008).

Apart from schoolbooks, the Sophoclean papyri from the third century to the first century BC give evidence of the lost *Tyro I* and/or *II*, *Niobe* and *Inachus*, and perhaps *Phrixus* and *Iphigeneia*, along with a finding of *Ant.* dated to first century BC–first century AD. Findings dating back to the second century and the beginning of the third century AD should be ascribed to the dramas *Acrisius*, *Ajax the Locrian*, *The Captive Women*, *Eurypylus*, *Ichn.*, *Epigoni*, *Niobe* (?), *The Men of Scyrus* (?), and *Thyestes*; we find remains of *Aj.*, *Ant.*, *OC*, *OT*, and *Trach.* from the same period. Two findings from Oxyrhynchus are particularly interesting; they both contain passages from *OT*: *POxy* 2180 (ll. 60–587, with a large number of errors and a few omissions) and from P.S.I. 1192 (ll. 178–200, not present in *POxy* 2180).²⁹ The same provenance, the same hand, and the same columniation (20 lines, 11 cm. in height) suggest the identification of the two fragments as parts of the same roll.³⁰ Considering the width of the top and bottom margins and that of the intercolumniation, this sample consisted of a roll ca. 8.5 m. long and at least 19.3 cm. high, with a roughly square appearance (11 cm. high and 11 cm. wide from one column to another), and wide margins.³¹

Among the findings of this period from Oxyrhynchus we can recognize the work of various scribes who copied Sophocles' plays:

2nd cent. AD:

- scribe A11 Johnson, to whom we owe *The Prophets* or *Polyidus* as well as other plays in *POxy* 1083 and 2453, a roll with Plato's *Leges* (*POxy* 3675) and another with *Odyssey* 23 (*POxy* Hels. 6);³²

2nd–3rd AD:

- scribe A22 J., to whom *POxy* 3151 (*Ajax the Locrian* and perhaps other Sophocles' plays) and *POxy* 2427 (Epicharmus' plays) are attributed;
- scribe A24 J., who copied *The Men of Scyrus* in *POxy* 2077, *Theseus* (?) in *POxy* 2452, Euripidean texts in P.S.I. 1302 (*Alcmeon I* or *II*, fr. 86 Kn.) and in *POxy* 3215 (*Hec.* 223–228 and fr. 953e Kn.) and other authors such as Antiphon the Sophist (*POxy* 1364), Aeschines Socraticus (*POxy* 2889) and *Halcyon* by Leo (*POxy* 3683).
- *POxy* 1174 (*Ichn.*) and *POxy* 1175 (*Eurypylus*), late second century AD. are two distinct rolls, written by the same scribe (B1 J.). Both rolls 'are

²⁹ Both numbered 1466 *MP*³.

³⁰ Thus definitively Austin (2005) 106, *contra* Barrett (2007) 369; cf. Giannachi (2007) 34–56.

³¹ Johnson (2004).

³² Johnson (2004) 62.

written to match in format', they are wider than *POxy* 2180 + P.S.I. 1192, and use two levels of indentation to indicate the change of metre and character.³³

As far as we can tell from the scarce documentation, the remains of lost plays were still the majority in the third century AD; for example, *Thyestes* (the third of the Sophoclean plays bearing the same title?) was still being copied professionally at the beginning of the century in the Oxyrhynchite area.³⁴ But the seven selected plays are the only ones attested in the fourth and fifth centuries AD and only in codices. *POxy* 22, dated to the middle of the fourth century AD,³⁵ is a sheet belonging to a papyrus codex containing *OT* 375–385, 429–441; the text is laid out in a single column. The page ↓ (written transversally to the papyrus fibres) starts with l. 375 and it is numbered ρι[(that is between 110 and 119). If every page contained 54 lines, the first 374 lines of *OT* almost completely filled 7 pages and the play started with one page →.³⁶ The portion of codex before the beginning of *OT*, from 103 to 112 pages, could contain from ca. 5560 to ca. 6050 lines, and this does not permit us to formulate any hypothesis about the sequence, which in any case does not correspond to the sequence that was prevalent in the Byzantine era (*Aj.*, *El.*, *OT*). In any case the whole heptad can fill 192 pages, equal to 47 double sheets, longer than standards documented in the papyrus codices (e.g. *Ilias* in P. Amh. inv. G 202 = no. 870 *MP*³, ca. 300 AD, filled 124 pages, that is 31 *bifolia*), yet possible if this is not a single-quire codex. See *POxy* 1369 (fragments of a papyrus codex, certainly not a single-quire one, fifth-sixth century AD) for a comparison:³⁷ with 43 lines and only one column per page, the text of *OT* took up 36 pages, and the whole heptad ca. 241 pages = ca. 120 *folia*.

None of the Sophoclean papyri preserves traces of musical notation—unless the unpublished Ashmolean Museum inv. 89B/29–33, a papyrus from the Ptolemaic era (third-second century BC) with the subscription 'Αχιλλεύ[ς] Σοφοκλ[έου]ς, actually contains one of Sophocles' plays otherwise known as *The Ethiopians*, *The Lovers of Achilles*, or *Memnon*.³⁸

³³ Johnson (2004) 29; Savignago (2008) nos. 17–18.

³⁴ P.Lond. inv. 2110 (*MP*³ 2092); cf. Parsons (2007) 264.

³⁵ Orsini (2005) 90–91; Turner (1971) 58 highlighted the graphic similarities with the *Vaticanus* of the Bible (Vatic. gr. 1209), on which see Cavallo (1967) 51–56. On the codex, cf. Turner (1977) 75–76 and no. 263.

³⁶ Turner (1977) 75–76, on pagination, and 65–68, on the alternation of fiber direction in the gatherings of early codices (an extension of the so-called 'Law of Gregory').

³⁷ Turner (1977) 114; Giannachi (2007) 56–61.

³⁸ West (1999); Gammacurta (2006) no. 16.

From Imperial Egypt to Byzantium. Athenaeus of Naucratis (2nd–3rd cent. AD) in his *Deipnosophistae* seems to be well informed about the contexts and the titles of the plays from which the majority of his approximately 70 Sophoclean quotations come. Among the works by Sophocles in his library, he draws quotations from various untitled plays, as well as from 5 of the 7 preserved plays (not from *Phil.* and *OC*),³⁹ and from 36 lost dramas; owing to his fondness for digging out unusual or affected words from the books of his library, sometimes he is the only or the main witness to otherwise unknown dramas, even satyr plays.

As for the text, Athenaeus knew *Ant.* 1167, lost in all the medieval MSS but postulated by the *scholium vetus*. We can assume with Collard (1969) 171 that an error like *Ichn.* 281 *κὺκ ἐπισχολάζεται* (*Deipnosophistae* and *Epitome*) instead of *κὺκ ἐτι σχολάζεται* (*POxy* 1174) may have occurred during the transliteration from the uncial, but the main error (that is the exchange ETI/EPI) probably dates back to antiquity and thus characterizes Athenaeus' text.

The latest product of Alexandrine philology applied to Sophocles seems to be the commentary written by Horapollon (fifth century AD), who was also the author of comments on Homer and Alcaeus; his commentary on Sophocles was lost but the news transmitted by *Suda* about it is 'a further proof of the wide reading of the professional teachers of his time'.⁴⁰ In Constantinople Emperor Constantius II (reigning from 337 to 361AD) promoted the foundation of the imperial library; Themistius praised it as an enterprise destined to 'bring back to light monuments which were crumbling like buildings in the treasure of memory (*ἐν τῷ θησαυρῷ τῆς μνημοσύνης*)'.⁴¹ Nevertheless, this was not a philological operation, rather it aimed at the material conservation of the books; we do not know whether research and selection criteria among public and private books were applied. It is likely that only the Alexandrian selection of Sophocles' work was accepted. The relationship between the availability of the books and their use for grammatical and lexicographic reasons is also unclear: Sophocles is absent from the fragments of the Atticist lexicon by Orus (active in Constantinople in the middle of the fifth century AD). However, it is possible that the medieval MSS, since they share some uncial errors, descend from a single

³⁹ Collard (1969); Marchiori (2003).

⁴⁰ Wilson (1983a) 44.

⁴¹ Them. *Or.* 4 (read in the senate of Constantinople in 357), 59d–60c; cf. Lemerle (1971) 54–60; Wilson (1983a) 50–51; Cavallo (1986) 89–91; Vanderspoel (1995) 96–100.

palaeotypus, that is an antique edition dating back to the fourth and fifth centuries AD and referable to Constantinople.⁴²

From Byzantium to European Humanism. In 815 Johannes Grammaticus (780–863, Patriarch of Constantinople 836–843) was allowed to collect *palaià biblia* from monasteries and churches in order to study them. They were supposed to be books of theology but, as Alphonse Dain observed, this operation suggested ‘un mouvement de centralisation du travail intellectuel vers la capitale’.⁴³ Shortly after the mid-ninth century AD, the imperial regent Bardas reorganized the imperial university, laying the foundation for what has been defined as a second Hellenism or the First Byzantine Humanism.⁴⁴ This is the context in which the transliteration into minuscule (*metacharakterismòs*) took place; we must assume that it was completed by the end of the ninth century AD. This was a key event in the history of the Byzantine culture and of the tradition of Classics. In fact it involved a set of operations besides the adoption of minuscule script, such as the division of words, a basically systematic punctuation, and the writing of breathings and accents. The *metacharakterismòs* made accessible in a new editorial format the texts of Aeschylus and of Sophocles selected by the Alexandrian philology, while for Euripides it offered a composite collection, produced by assembling the Alexandrian selection and sections of the *corpus* conserved in other contexts. The importance of the operations involved in the transliteration goes far beyond the production of more compact books, hence saving vellum or paper.⁴⁵ Instead, we must consider that (a) this complex editorial work made available a text resulting from operations that brought together a great amount of knowledge transmitted by grammatical treatises, (b) that the text was often accompanied by *scholia* which synthesized a long exegetical tradition, and (c) that texts, especially the poetic ones, were provided with glosses in order to clarify the wording.⁴⁶ The *metacharakterismòs* was a decisive moment in the development of the First Byzantine Humanism, yet among contemporaries neither Patriarch Photius (ca. 810–ca. 893), reader

⁴² Alberti (1987) and (1996); on the notion of *palaeotypus*, cf. Waszink (1975).

⁴³ Dain (1954) 38.

⁴⁴ Lemerle (1971) 242–266.

⁴⁵ *POxy* 1369 (see *supra*) is likely to consist of so many *folia* as the Sophoclean part of the MS Laur. L; and another Sophoclean papyrus codex, *POxy* 22, had more room for text than L.

⁴⁶ As for the relationship between antique commentaries and *scholia*, see Montana (2006); Ucciardello (2006); Dickey (2007) provides a well-documented survey on this topic.

of historians, geographers, orators, and curious enthusiast of novelists and collectors of prodigies, nor Arethas of Caesarea (born ca. 850), in spite of his knowledge of classical authors, are mediators of texts of the tragic poets. As it has been observed, for a long time the 'acknowledged quotations from Homer or Sophocles were the stock-in-trade of Byzantine writers'—and little else.⁴⁷

However, there is evidence that the codices of the tragedians circulated in the first half of the tenth century AD: an anonymous Byzantine scholar purchased a Sophoclean codex between 920 and 940, most likely written in minuscule.⁴⁸ The uncial errors that distinguish the various groups of MSS (see *infra*) must date back to different transliterations, so they seem to confirm the spread of multiple copies in minuscule.⁴⁹ The two most ancient Byzantine MSS of Sophocles L and L belong to a period not much later than that of the 'Anonymous Byzantine Scholar'. According to Jean Irigoin L (Laur. 32.9) dates back to the years from 960 to 980. Errors due to typical misunderstandings of minuscule suggest that at least the immediate ancestor of L was already in minuscule.⁵⁰

L, a parchment codex, contains the tragedies of Sophocles (in order: *Aj.*, *El.*, *OT*, *Ant.*, *Trach.*, *Phil.*, *OC*), those of Aeschylus and *Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius; the copyists of Aeschylus and Apollonius are coeval with the scribe of Sophocles' text. The Sophoclean tragedies are annotated with *scholia* in the external margins, with glosses between the lines or written in other available spaces, with variants and corrections by a contemporary hand. Glosses introduced by *λείπει* (*subauditur*, 'it is implied') and by *ἀντί* ('instead of') often seem to have a different origin from the scholiastic *corpus* copied in the external margins; also many of the variants (introduced by *γράφεται*) are not part of the marginal *scholia*. L also has glosses and corrections of a later date; Turyn recognized the handwriting of the copyist of the MS Paris B.N. gr. 2712 (A) among these: the supplement of *OT* 800, omitted by L, in the inside margin of A, is well-known. L was purchased in 1424 by Giovanni Aurispa in Constantinople and passed to Niccolò Niccoli, then it came into the library of St Mark in Florence and, after a brief transfer to Rome among the books of Pope Leo X, it eventually arrived at the

⁴⁷ Jenkins (1954) 15.

⁴⁸ Lemerle (1971) 246–248 with bibliography.

⁴⁹ Ferrari (1983); Alberti (1987), (1996).

⁵⁰ Irigoin (1951) 449—even so, Dain (1954) 45 argues that the scribe of L directly copied from a majuscule MS. On L, cf. Turyn (1952) 101–124; Hecquet-Devienne (1996) 9–23 (only about *OT*).

Laurentian Library. L was long neglected as a witness for Sophocles' text, despite the fact that it was known to scholars as the most important witness for Aeschylus; but it was used by Janus Lascaris as the principal source for the ancient *scholia* in his 1518 edition.

The palimpsest L (Leiden B.P.G. 60A) is a parchment codex arranged in the same period of L,⁵¹ initially containing the seven Sophoclean dramas in the same order as L and then reused in order to host patristic texts in the fourteenth century AD; it was rediscovered bearing the Sophoclean text only in 1926.⁵² Both because of its graphic and codicological similarities, and because of the quality of the text, however difficult to read, it has often been defined as a twin of L. In fact Λ is smaller: L and Λ were probably copied in the same *scriptorium*, but 'ces deux formats, dépendant l'un de l'autre, correspondent à la destination du manuscrit: exemplaire de bibliothèque [*scil.* L] ou exemplaire privé'.⁵³ The hands in the two MSS are certainly similar and contemporaneous, yet they differ in some details. The alleged *errores separativi*, which supposedly excluded that Λ was copied from L (cf. Dawe 1973), had already been drastically re-evaluated by Irigoin (1951) and they have finally been refuted by Papathomopoulos' collation.⁵⁴ We can therefore suggest that Λ is an apograph of L rather than its twin; yet a definitive conclusion would require a detailed analysis of the corrections made to L by contemporaneous hands, in order to clarify cases like the omission of *El.* 584–586 (a skip from τυγχάνοις to τυγχάνεις), common to the two MSS but added only in L, and of *El.* 1485–1486 in L, where the verses have been restored by a corrector, while they are in the right place in Λ (the vv. are also missing in K [see *infra*], where the copyist added them in the margin). As for the *scholia*, the most recent studies show the dependence of Λ on L both in *Electra* and in *Trachiniae*.⁵⁵

Direct sources, other than those of the preserved MSS, have been postulated for the *Suda* lexicon (tenth century AD), for Johannes Tzetzes (ca. 1110–1180) and for Eustathius of Thessalonika (ca. 1115–1195).

Regarding *Suda*: this lexicon, contemporaneous with L and Λ, preserved scholiastic material present in L and in the *familia romana* (see *infra*); while De Marco (1952) xii–xiii held that this encyclopedic lexicon contaminated the tradition of L and the one characterizing the ancestor of the *familia*

⁵¹ Irigoin (1951) 448–449.

⁵² Vürtheim (1926); cf. Kranz, review of Vürtheim in *Gnomon* 3 (1927) 424–427.

⁵³ Irigoin (1951) 455.

⁵⁴ Papathomopoulos (1993) with bibliography.

⁵⁵ Xenis (2010a) 75–76; Xenis (2010b) 42.

romana, of which both Havekoss (1961) 30, and Christodoulou (1977) 107*–110* asserted that it was the twin. Xenis (2010a) 76–80 concludes that *Suda* ‘borrowed some material from a now lost copy of the Laurentian version which was independent from the surviving ones’, at least for *Electra*.

As for Eustathius: Colonna (1972) postulated that some Sophoclean readings attested by Eustathius and not recorded in the direct tradition derived from a MS unknown to us as well as from some lost lexicons or grammar books; however, see also the reservations expressed by Scattolin (2003) on this issue. Maybe things were different for Tzetzes, who ‘at certain stages of his career possessed or had access to a well stocked library’,⁵⁶ but as far as Sophocles is concerned, it seems that work remains to be done.

Alongside the two oldest witnesses L and Λ, an important role has been taken by the Laur. 31.10 (K), a paper codex formerly dated back to the beginning of the fourteenth century AD, then attributed to the *scriptorium* of Ioannikios⁵⁷ and eventually assigned to the second half of the twelfth century AD⁵⁸ and to the area of Constantinople.⁵⁹

K contains the Sophoclean heptad from f. 143, but in a slightly different order from L and L: *Trach.* is in the last position, probably added after OC, which supposedly concluded the antigraph.⁶⁰ The Sophoclean part was attached only later to the first 142 ff. (eight Euripidean plays: *Hec.*, *Or.*, *Med.*, *Pho.*, *Alc.*, *Andr.*, *Hipp.*, and *Rh.*, owned by Leontius Pilatus [†1363]). As Finglass (2008) concludes, K, which shares some errors with L and Λ, ‘provides us with several good unique readings, provides our earliest reference for many more, and acts as an independent witness to the Laurentian tradition alongside L’. Its relationships to L and Λ are demonstrated as to the *scholia* to *Electra*.⁶¹

Of the almost 190 manuscripts from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries AD that preserve the Sophoclean texts and materials pertaining to Sophocles, only relatively few have been explored in depth. Some of them have been investigated both from the textual and codicological point of view by Turyn (1949) and (1952), and on closer textual bases by Dawe (1973) and (1978). In addition to the examination of readings in Dawe’s fundamental

⁵⁶ Wilson (1983a) 196; cf. Luzzatto (1999) 155–162.

⁵⁷ Fourteenth century: Turyn (1952) 166; attribution to Ioannikios: Turyn (1957) 333. See Finglass (2008) 441–443 for a picture of the subsequent studies.

⁵⁸ Wilson (1983b); cf. Degni (2008).

⁵⁹ Degni (2008) 228–237.

⁶⁰ Degni (2008) 211–213.

⁶¹ Xenis (2010a) 75–76.

Table 2. This table is based on Turyn (1949) and Turyn (1952), with corrections according to later studies. A small number of MSS about which very little precise information is available is not considered. The chronology is quite approximate: e.g. the MSS from ‘ca. 1300’ to ‘late fourteenth century’ and half of those dated ‘fourteenth-fifteenth cent.’ are grouped together in the fourteenth century AD.

century	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV	XVI
<i>the seven plays</i>	2		1	1	6	8	2
<i>Aj., El.</i>					2	21	7
<i>Aj., El., OT</i>				4	35	21	7
<i>Aj., El., OT, Ant.</i>					6	4	1
<i>only scholia</i>					2	4	6
<i>other</i>				2	4	12	13
<i>total</i>	2		1	7	55	70	36

contributions, we also have some complete collations of individual dramas and MSS.⁶² The following table shows the distribution of the Byzantine and western MSS, by age and type of content.

The circulation of the heptad was limited, unlike that of the triad *Aj., El., OT*, which was widely spread. This triad was the result of a thematic selection (a ‘Trojan’ play, an ‘Argive’ and a ‘Theban’ one), similar to that of the triad *Hec., Or., Phoen.*, which represents the majority of Euripidean witnesses. Both these triads, like the Aeschylean one (*PV, Sept., Pers.*), which is sometimes combined in various MSS with that of Sophocles, were probably assembled during the Palaeologan Renaissance, which flourished after the re-conquest of Constantinople by Michael VIII Palaeologus (1461) and developed under his son Andronikos II (reigning from 1282 to 1328). At this time we see a sort of renaissance of Sophoclean studies, although less conspicuous than the flourishing of studies on Aeschylus, Euripides, Aristophanes, and Pindar. The monk Theodoulos, better known as Thomas Magister (ca. 1275–post 1347), annotated the triad and *Ant.* (this ‘extended triad’ is also well represented from the fourteenth century AD) and emended the text of the *genos* and of the *hypotheses* to *OC, El., and Ant.* His work on Sophocles probably dates from 1300–1301. As well as for Sophocles as for Aeschylus, Euripides, and Aristophanes, a *recensio thomana*—that is, a real edition, even repeated by the scholar—has often been postulated; but in many MSS

⁶² *Ant.*: Kopff (1974); *OC*: Speake (1978). MSS G, Q, R: Easterling (1967b) as for *Aj.* and (1969) as for *Phil.*; MS Iena Bos.q.7 (J): Petrucione (1983); K: Metlikovitz (1890); Finglass (2008), mainly for the triad.

‘un commentario di chiara origine tomana si accompagna a un testo che nulla ha a che fare con Thomas ma può essere considerato una sorta di vulgata’, so we must consider Thomas as a commentator rather than a true editor.⁶³ The same conclusion can be drawn about the slightly older figures of Maximus Planudes (ca. 1260–ca. 1305), who also devoted himself to annotating Sophocles’ text, and Manuel Moschopoulos (thirteenth-fourteenth centuries AD), to whom a proper edition of Sophocles had been attributed, until Dawe (1973) proved otherwise.⁶⁴ Recent studies on the MSS produced in Thessalonica between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries AD help to provide a far more complex picture of this erudite *milieu* than that outlined by Turyn: the most eminent figure, that is Demetrius Triclinius († ca. 1340), neither depends on the so-called Thoman editions, nor is a mere follower of Thomas Magister; rather, he appears a contemporary with similar interests, so that, ‘almeno fino a un certo periodo, non sussistono demarcazioni nette fra ambiente tomano e ambiente tricliniano’.⁶⁵ The Sophoclean interests of Demetrius Triclinius, a real editor of classical texts, and a re-discoverer—thanks to Hephæstion and the *De metris Pindaricis* by Isaac Tzetzes—of the responsive structure of the lyrics,⁶⁶ are recorded in the MS tradition by a series of *Studienausgaben* and by other non autographic MSS containing the final edition, some of which probably come from his very same *scriptorium*.⁶⁷

The whole heptad is contained in the following Triclinian witnesses: T (Paris B.N. gr. 2711, probably written in Constantinople in the 1330s or 40s), Ta (Marc. Gr. 470 = coll. 824, copied in the circle of Cardinal Bessarion around the mid-15th century AD), Te (Naples B.N. II F 34, similar to Ta and only slightly subsequent). Other Triclinian MSS contain the triad *Aj. El. OT*, the dyad *Aj. El.* and *Ant.* alone. Others, in conclusion, contain only *scholia* to the tetras (triad plus *Ant.*). The work of Triclinius on Sophocles, recovered

⁶³ Here and *infra* I refer to Bianconi (2007) 72–86. The texts of Aeschylus and Sophocles in the MS Laur. 32.2 (Zg, belonged to Simon Atumanus, bishop of Gerace in the South of Italy, in 1348: heptad without *OC*) reflect the interests of his *milieu*, while the main source of Planudes’ annotations is the MS Naples B.N. II.F.9 (D, XIV *in.*: triad); cf. Wilson (1983a) 238–239.

⁶⁴ Wilson (1976) 172: ‘the (‘moschopouleian’) *scholia* and the glosses do not designate the characteristic readings of this group of MSS as conjectures, and ... the quality of the readings ranges so widely, from the brilliant to the absurd, that it is very hard to accept them all as the product of a single mind. Taken together these arguments seem to me conclusive. Dawe then suggests that the *scholia* attributed to this scholar may be more derivative than is generally believed. This certainly coincides with my impression of the *scholia* on the *OT*’. Cf. Wilson (1983a) 245–246.

⁶⁵ Bianconi (2007) 87; on Triclinius: 91–118.

⁶⁶ Aubreton (1949); Tessier (1999).

⁶⁷ Tessier (2005) ix–lxviii.

for the first time in the mid-fifteenth century AD (*Ta*),⁶⁸ was then used by Adrien Turnèbe (*Turnebus*) for his edition (Paris 1553), essential for the lyrical sections and for the Triclinian paratexts provided.⁶⁹

Not all the Byzantine witnesses of Sophocles come from Constantinople or Thessalonica: the MS Laur. C.S. 152 (G) was copied in Apulia on July 15th 1282; it contains *Aj.*, *OT.*, *El.*, and *Phil.* accompanied by *scholia* paged in blocks consecutively to portions of the text.⁷⁰ Two more MSS representative with G of the so-called *familia romana* come from the South of Italy: Paris B.N. Suppl. gr. 109 (Q, sixteenth century AD: *Aj.*, *Phil.*, *OC*), and Vat. gr. 2291 (R, fifteenth century AD: *Aj.*, *OT*, *Phil.*, *El.*, *Ant.*, *OC*, *Trach.*).

Alexander Turyn's studies confirmed the excellence of Laur. L because of its greater proximity to the ancestor of the whole medieval tradition, that is the archetype postulated in minuscule from the ninth or the beginning of the tenth century at the latest.⁷¹

According to Turyn the so-called *familia romana* (GQR) also derived from the same transliteration as LA, despite offering a text which was often nearer to that presented by the Sophoclean quotations in the *Suda* lexicon than to that in LA. A third group of MSS, the *familia parisina*, to which the model of the Aldine *editio princeps* (1502) belongs,⁷² is mainly represented by Paris B.N. gr. 2712: A, Marc. gr. 467: U, Wien N.B. phil. gr. 48: Y (containing *Aj.*—*Ant.* as in L, and then *OC*, *Trach.*, *Phil.*). This *familia* was downgraded by Turyn as the result of interpolation with a text akin to that of GQR (for *Trach.* and *Phil.*), to that of LA (for *Ant.* and *OC*), and to an alleged review of the triad *Aj.*, *El.*, *OT* produced by Manuel Moschopoulos around 1290.⁷³ This hypothesis, which necessarily demanded a new dating of A from 1325–1330, was radically overthrown by Dawe (1973):⁷⁴ he dated U to 1308–1311, on the basis of its watermarks, and restored the traditional dating of A to the end of the thirteenth century AD. It follows that the ancestor of AUY could not use the hypothetical Moscopouleian review of the text.

On the basis of the aforementioned findings,⁷⁵ it would seem consistent to replace the hypothesis of a single transliteration to minuscule—hence an

⁶⁸ Tessier (2003).

⁶⁹ Wilson (1983a) 249–256; Tessier (2005) xvii–xix; Bianconi (2007) 100–101.

⁷⁰ Arnesano (1999).

⁷¹ Turyn (1952) 101–124.

⁷² MS S. Petersburg B.N. gr. 731, second half of the 15th cent.; see Benešević (1926) and Sicherl (1997) 347–350: Y was used only to correct the proofs of the Aldina.

⁷³ Turyn (1949), (1952) 15–30.

⁷⁴ Dawe (1973–1978).

⁷⁵ Ferrari (1983); Alberti (1987), (1996).

archetype configuring a 'closed' manuscript tradition—with that of *more* transliterations of the Sophoclean text: besides the one that the *familia laurentiana* depends on, also (with a different and decreasing degree of probability, determined also by progressive contamination) those which the *familia romana* and the *parisina* descend from. This will prompt us to conceive of an 'open' tradition with more uncial MSS going back to a *palaeotypus* and separately transliterated.

AJAX

P.J. Finglass*

Sophocles' *Ajax* was probably first performed at the Dionysia festival at Athens in the 450s or 440s BC. In this essay I presuppose a basic knowledge of the plot—consulting a *Companion to Sophocles* is no substitute for reading Sophocles, whether in the original or in translation. I also avoid treating in detail many fascinating subjects which a longer introduction to the drama would cover. For example, I say almost nothing about Sophocles' interaction with earlier traditions concerning Ajax's death, or about the considerable problems involved in working out how the play was staged. Instead, I concentrate on a single, central question: what, if anything, holds the play together? Even this narrow line of inquiry receives only a brief discussion in the available space. Nevertheless, the focus on one major topic, of interest to specialists and non-specialists alike, should prove more illuminating than (or at least not as unsatisfactory as) an attempt to cover several issues in a few pages.¹

The unity of the play, and in particular the relevance and quality of its final scenes, has been debated since antiquity. The margins of some medieval manuscripts preserve two ancient criticisms of the exchange between Teucer and Menelaus at 1120–1141: 'such quibbles are not appropriate to tragedy. Sophocles' desire to prolong the action after the suicide led to a frigid result, and the destruction of the tragic pathos' and 'this sort of thing belongs more to comedy than tragedy'.² The play has attracted similar objections in modern times. So according to one seventeenth-century commentator, 'le denoüement de l'*Ajax* ne répond pas à l'intrigue: l'auteur ne devoit

* I am grateful to Professor Alan Sommerstein for helpful comments.

¹ Hesk (2003) provides a thoughtful introduction to the play, and Garvie (1998) an accessible commentary. The three recent items of scholarship which I have found most stimulating are Winnington-Ingram (1980) 11–72, Heath (1987) 165–208, and Scullion (1994) 89–128. Each contains extensive further bibliography. At every point this essay skates over issues which deserve fuller documentation, which limits of space and the conventions of the genre lead me to eschew. I use my own text and translation throughout.

² Scholia on 1123 (p. 227 Chr.) τὰ τοιαῦτα σοφίσματα οὐκ οἰκεῖα τραγωδίας. μετὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀναίρεσιν ἐπεκτείναι τὸ δράμα θελήσας ἐψυχρεύσατο καὶ ἔλυσε τὸ τραγικὸν πάθος and on 1127 (p. 228) τὸ δὲ τοιοῦτον κωμωδίας μάλλον ἢ τραγωδίας.

pas finir un spectacle si terrible, si funeste, & si pitoyable par une contestation froide & languissante'; while another, a century later, argues that 'les longs discours, les plaidoyers de Teucer, de Ménélas & d'Agamemnon, quelque beaux qu'ils soient en eux mêmes, laissent l'action absolument éteinte; & voilà ce qu'on ne peut excuser'.³ Nineteenth-century critics such as Lobeck, Hermann, and Bergk held a similar view.⁴ More recently, scholars have been keener to explain and justify the construction of the play than to condemn it.

Ajax kills himself at line 865, when the play still has some 40% of its length to run.⁵ In *Trachiniae* and *Antigone* Deianeira and Antigone depart with over 35% and 30% of their respective dramas remaining. Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus* goes offstage to blind himself at line 1185; more than 20% of the play remains, even though the truth about his parentage has now been revealed. So the relatively early loss of a protagonist, or the placing of a climax with a chunk of a play still to run, can be paralleled within the available Sophoclean corpus. Yet the construction of *Ajax* has unsettled critics more than that of these other plays. In *Trachiniae* the loss of Deianeira is balanced by the arrival of Heracles, whose death agonies provide a memorable finale. Despite its title, *Antigone* owes as much to Creon as to Antigone herself, and his tragedy has still some way to go when she leaves the stage. Indeed, Antigone's story is not quite complete even at this point, since there will be an abortive attempt to rescue her from her living tomb. The *exodos* of *Oedipus Tyrannus* is dominated by the protagonist's moving laments as he attempts to come to terms with his dramatic fall.

Ajax, on the other hand, may seem unsatisfying after the protagonist's suicide. The loss of such a memorable and dominating character at a relatively early point was always going to present structural problems: how could Sophocles maintain the interest of the audience? These difficulties are exacerbated by the characters who now command the stage. Ajax was a figure of terrible grandeur; his speeches and interactions with others displayed high passion, as he wrestled with the tragic consequences of the Judgment of the Arms. By contrast, the debates between Teucer and the Atridae over Ajax's burial, which make up most of the remaining section, have seemed

³ Rapin (1674) 194; Brumoy (1785) 468–469.

⁴ For references, see Foerster (1869) 715.

⁵ We should beware of designating this latter section 'the second half' of the play: a 50–50 split is quite different from a 60–40 one.

to many insufficiently elevated, with sophistry and character attacks taking precedence over consideration of the major ethical issues at stake.

One of the ancient complaints about the frigidity of this part of the play, cited above, is attached to one of the low points in these quarrels: an irrelevant argument between Teucer and Menelaus about the relative merits of bowmen and hoplites. Menelaus and Agamemnon make clear in their speeches (1052–1090, 1226–1263) that they are acting merely out of personal spite, not through the promptings of justice. But Teucer, Ajax's defender, is scarcely more impressive. His reply to Menelaus (1093–1117) begins with an effective rebuttal, but quickly degenerates into personal abuse which makes even the Chorus uneasy (1118–1119). Answering Agamemnon (1266–1315), he opens with a powerful defence of Ajax's prowess, before being diverted into an attack on his opponent's lineage, matching similar abuse from Agamemnon (1259–1263) and thus allowing him to set the topic, and the tone, for the debate. Teucer may be the victor, but we are a long way from the stark magnificence, and even beauty, of Ajax's speeches (e.g. 430–480, 646–692).⁶ The very fact that there are two such debates, each equally inconclusive, may induce a certain monotony.

According to one defence of this section, such a tone is deliberate: the death of Ajax has diminished the world. Knox memorably states this view in an influential essay:⁷

The tone of the speeches made over his body in the second half of the play emphasizes the fact that the world is a smaller, meaner place because of his death. The last half of the play shows us a world emptied of greatness; all that was great in the world lies there dead, impaled on that gigantic sword, while smaller men, with motives both good and bad, dispute over its burial. The unheroic tone of the end of the play (with its threats and boasts and personal insults) has often been criticized as an artistic failure; surely it is deliberate. Nothing else would make us feel what has happened. A heroic age has passed away, to be succeeded by one in which action is replaced by argument, stubbornness by compromise, defiance by acceptance ...

There is some truth in this. No one in the play is quite like Ajax; once he is gone something is inevitably lost. But accepting Knox's view wholesale creates further difficulties. First, it does not have anything positive to say about the final 40% of the play, which (under this analysis) serves merely as foil for the preceding 60%. No doubt Sophocles wanted his audience to

⁶ For spirited attempts to champion Teucer, see Heath (1987) 206; Hesk (2003) 114–118.

⁷ Knox (1961) 2 = (1979) 126.

think well of the first three-fifths of his play; but there were better ways of effecting this than writing off the remainder.

Second, we may question whether Ajax is as 'heroic' as Knox implies.⁸ This is, after all, the man who attempts to slaughter the army because he was denied the Arms of Achilles. He takes this decision while sane; only later is he afflicted by madness, sent by Athena to ensure that he does not achieve his goal. When he recovers, he regrets not his original decision, but his failure to carry it through (364–367, 372–376). He then kills himself without making sufficient provision for the safety of his concubine and young son, ignoring a moving plea from the former (485–524); he relies on Teucer to protect them, even though he knows that Teucer is currently away from the camp (560–564). His final speech calls for the Erinyes to take vengeance on the entire army (843–844); he goes to his death having learned nothing, still regarding his injured honour as the consideration which overrides everything else. Undoubtedly impressive, Ajax is by no means always admirable, and his death is likely to stir mixed emotions in many of the audience.

Perhaps we can modify Knox's view. The final 40% of the play does indeed help to establish Ajax as a sympathetic and admirable character: not simply by contrasting with the magnificence of the earlier scenes, but by providing an opportunity for the protagonist's post-mortem rehabilitation.⁹ Such an aim was attractive from a dramatic point of view, since it would encourage the audience to consider Ajax from new perspectives. In Knoxian terms, Sophocles' portrayal of the inadequacy of the figures who opposed him, Menelaus and Agamemnon, helps to achieve this goal. Even his chief defender, Teucer, was deliberately drawn as a somewhat inferior champion. The contrast between these figures and Ajax would remind the audience of what had most impressed them about the fallen protagonist.

But this was only one part of a wider strategy of rehabilitation, and must be seen alongside other techniques. The moving laments of Tecmessa and the Chorus, followed by Teucer's distraught speech over Ajax's body, emphasize the sense of grief and loss which his death has caused to his immediate family.¹⁰ The tableau of Eurysaces holding onto his father's corpse in the posture of a suppliant, as arranged by Teucer, hints that

⁸ Knox's positive view of Ajax and other Sophoclean protagonists received its classic statement in Knox (1964); more recently, Garvie (1998) adopts an ultra-Knoxian view in his commentary, seeing the entire play as an assertion of Ajax's great and admirable nature.

⁹ See Hubbard (2003) 158–159n4 for some scholars who take this view.

¹⁰ 937–973, a passage combining song and speech, and 992–1027.

Ajax will enjoy cultic honours, or at the very least suggests that there is something numinous about his body.¹¹ The Chorus members mournfully describe how their long sufferings at Troy have been accentuated through the loss of their only champion and defender.¹² Teucer's speech in his debate with Agamemnon, before he is side-tracked into defending his lineage and attacking Agamemnon's, powerfully vindicates Ajax's massive contribution to the Greek war effort.¹³ Even Odysseus, Ajax's great enemy and the recipient of the Arms which Ajax had so fatally desired, intervenes on his behalf and acknowledges that Ajax's good qualities should take precedence over their enmity. Generously, he describes him as 'best of the Achaeans, apart from Achilles'.¹⁴

That is not to say that the audience forgets the other sides of Ajax's character. The final moments of the play bring them to the fore. Teucer is unable to accept the offer of help from Odysseus for the funeral, in case that assistance is 'unwelcome' to the dead man.¹⁵ Even after death, and even after Odysseus' decisive intervention to secure his burial, Teucer suspects that Ajax will not relent from his anger against his old foe.¹⁶ Then as Teucer prepares to lift the corpse, he remarks at how its arteries are still pumping the 'dark force' (μέλαν/μένοος, 1412–1413) of his blood. Μένος can denote the battle rage of the hero, and so suggests the persistence of violent emotion even as the body is laid to rest. This does not cancel the value of Ajax's rehabilitation. Rather, it circumscribes and qualifies it, ensuring that the largely positive presentation of Ajax in the final scene is not allowed to negate the earlier parts of the play. Sophocles thus brings his audience to a complex view of his protagonist, which ignores neither his virtues nor his vices. He achieves this in part by the diptych structure, in which the first part emphasizes the darker side of Ajax's character, and the latter part its more positive aspects. In this way both sections play a significant and complementary part in shaping the audience's responses.

¹¹ 1171–1175. Cf. Burian (1972) 156: 'the final scenes are played against a solemn ritual tableau which holds the answer and testifies to the final vindication of the hero'.

¹² 1185–1222, especially 1211–1215.

¹³ 1266–1289. This is the first time in the play that the audience hears of specific achievements on Ajax's part on behalf of the Greeks: his steadfast defence of the ships, and his single combat with Hector. The former is described in terms which go beyond the Iliadic account in order to magnify Ajax's contribution. Cf. Gardiner (1987) 78: 'The poet does not even describe Ajax's heroic deeds until long after he is dead ... Until then, one sees only the bad side of Ajax'.

¹⁴ 1332–1345, 1355, 1357.

¹⁵ μή τῷ θανόντι τοῦτο δυσχερές ποιῶ, 1395.

¹⁶ This recalls Ajax's refusal to speak to Odysseus in the Underworld at Hom. *Od.* 11.543–547, 563–564.

The question of whether the play suffers after the suicide, and is thus not a properly unified composition, is, as we have seen, a hoary one, having already been discussed in antiquity. Concentration on this topic, however, should not divert our attention from the subtle handling of continuity present throughout the play. In one sense, Ajax's death forms an obvious and undeniable break-point. Moreover, immediately after he goes into the *skene* to die at 865, the Chorus reappears (the so-called *epiparodos*) in what seems a new beginning; a thematic link to the opening scene reinforces this idea.¹⁷ But the change of scene—a very rare occurrence on the Greek tragic stage—takes place at 814, when the Chorus leaves the stage. If the protagonist did not commit suicide fifty lines later, we would certainly refer to this point as the fundamental divide near the centre of the drama. Standing so close to the 'real' dividing point, it competes with it, challenging its status as the place where the second part of the play begins.

After Ajax's suicide is discovered, there is an extended lament over his body by Tecmessa and the Chorus, which lasts until 973. This is another crucial transition point: Tecmessa, Ajax's chief supporter up to this moment, now becomes a mute character, and Teucer arrives to take over that function. Yet even that break is not as decisive as it might have been, since Teucer proceeds to deliver his own lament over the corpse; not until 1040 is Menelaus seen approaching. Only then does the play turn its focus onto the question of Ajax's burial (a subject earlier raised by Ajax himself at 823–831), which dominates the remainder of the drama. Plainly, the death of Ajax is the most important break in the play; but it does not take much ingenuity to think of alternative dividing lines, all of which except one are found even later in the play than 865, and thus provide even more lopsided and unexpected divisions between the two parts. Such alternatives prevent the most important dividing point, 865, from assuming an unchallenged prominence in terms of its structural function.

More generally, the structuring of the play is handled with considerable sophistication. Alternation between song, speech, and recitative is fundamental to all tragedy, and is employed to good effect here. For example, from 134 to 330 the audience hears various kinds of speculation and information concerning Ajax's nocturnal expedition. After beginning in recitative, the Chorus soon break out into song; Tecmessa and the Chorus then converse in recitative, before the Chorus turn again to song. Each time the

¹⁷ See the discussion of the hunting theme, below.

song contains a more directly emotional burden. There follows a more argumentative section in spoken verse, before Tecmessa gives her extended narrative, again in speech. The variety which this ensures (so crucial for maintaining audience interest) is also manifested in Sophocles' placing of individual scenes. One characteristic of *Ajax* is the comparatively large proportion of the play taken up by long speeches or *rheseis*. This is, after all, the play of 'the Deception speech' (646–692) and 'Ajax's suicide speech' (815–865); and they only begin the list of substantial *rheseis* delivered by Tecmessa, Teucer, Menelaus, Agamemnon, and Ajax himself, as well as a lengthy Messenger-speech. But Sophocles alternates these to good effect. So the two speeches named above, each an especially impressive *rhesis* because they each take up an entire scene, are separated by an episode with numerous exits and entrances and a wide variety of types of utterance, including two different varieties of stichomythia.¹⁸ Similarly, between the two monumental speeches by Ajax (815–865, before the suicide) and Teucer (992–1027, lamenting it) comes a scene in which the Chorus members appear onstage from separate entrances (866–878), sing of their failure to find Ajax (879–890), learn (via Tecmessa) that Ajax is dead (891–903), and then join with Tecmessa, in song and speech, as they alternately lament their dead lord, while his covered body is brought out from the *skene* (904–973). This activity and interaction is the perfect foil for the static *rheseis* which precede and follow.

The delay, and consequent anticipation, of a crucial element of the plot can also help to unify the structure, encouraging viewers to see the play as a carefully conceived whole. In the opening scene the audience witness Athena's hostility to Ajax; she closes with the ominous statement 'the gods love the wise and hate the wicked',¹⁹ but there is no explanation of why she regards Ajax as (by implication) κακός; his recent anger against the Greeks, whom she supports, and his attempt to kill them, may seem motivation enough. Ajax is aware that Athena frustrated his attack and thereby contrived his disgrace; the Chorus, by contrast, had earlier failed to hit the mark when they speculated as to which god was responsible for his madness, mentioning Artemis and Ares.²⁰ But Ajax says nothing about Athena's

¹⁸ Cf. Goward (1999) 89: 'the two *rhêseis*, uttered in actual or virtual solitude, contrast violently with the "busy" group activities that come between them, characterised by misunderstanding, urgency, futility, even muddle'.

¹⁹ τοὺς δὲ σώφρονας / θεοὶ φιλοῦσι καὶ στύγουσιν τοὺς κακοὺς, 132–133.

²⁰ 401a–402, 450–453; 172–182.

motivation. Tecmessa will, much later, when she attributes Ajax's death to Athena's desire to gratify Odysseus.²¹ Later still, Menelaus will attribute the deliverance of the Greeks to 'one of the gods',²² without giving a name or a reason.

In the midst of this speculation comes a speech delivered almost exactly at the half-way point of the play, which is heard only by the Chorus; it is summarized for Tecmessa, but the summary omits the crucial reference to divine activity. At 748–783 the Messenger reveals the underlying cause of Athena's anger: Ajax's arrogance, as directed against his father, Telamon, and the goddess Athena. He rejected his father's advice to win his battles with a god's help; and dismissed Athena when she offered him assistance as he fought. 'With such words', the Messenger solemnly proclaims, 'he incurred the implacable anger of the goddess, by not thinking mortal thoughts'.²³ This information ultimately derives from the prophet Calchas, a peerless source.

The delay of this revelation has led some critics to downplay it; for example, Hester (1979) 242 complains that 'if Sophocles intends us to bear [Ajax's insult to Athena] throughout, he has certainly made a rare mess of his exposition'. The reverse is true. Sophocles has ensured the partial and progressive revelation of a major aspect of his plot, holding back vital details for maximum effect.²⁴ Ajax's current peril does not just derive from his reaction to the Judgment of the Arms. It is the consequence of arrogant behaviour towards others which predates even his arrival at Troy. The Chorus's contrast between his glorious departure from home, and his present woe, is misplaced; rather, 'he is the same man he was when he left Salamis'.²⁵ As the play moves forward in time, the audience is presented with additional information regarding the remoter past, enabling them to make more informed judgments regarding the characters and their actions.

²¹ 'Such indeed is the woe that the dread goddess, the daughter of Zeus, even Pallas, has contrived as a favour for Odysseus' (τοιόνδε μέντοι Ζηνὸς ἢ δεινὴ θεὸς/Παλλὰς φυτεύει πῆμ' Ὀδυσσέως χάριν, 952–953).

²² θεῶν τις, 1057; cf. 1060.

²³ τοιοῖσδέ τοι λόγοισιν ἀστεργὴ θεὰς/ἐκτῆσατ' ὀργήν, οὐ κατ' ἄνθρωπον φρονῶν, 776–777.

²⁴ Such delayed revelation is a characteristic of Homeric narrative. The information that Achilles has been offered a choice of two fates by his mother is relevant to his decision to withdraw from the fighting in *Iliad* 1, but is only revealed in book 9. The role of the Judgment of Paris in causing the war is not made clear until book 24 (see Davies 1981, especially 57n6 on tragic parallels).

²⁵ 609–621; Biggs (1966) 225.

The play is also unified by its overarching themes.²⁶ The first which the audience encounters is that of hunting and searching. At the opening of the play, Athena remarks that Odysseus is on the hunt (θηρώμενον, 2). This leads into a succession of terms and images taken from hunting, including a comparison of Odysseus to a keen-scented Laconian dog (7–8). Yet his quarry is no animal, but Ajax himself. As Athena tells her protégé what happened during the night, it turns out that this quarry was himself a would-be hunter, someone who attempted to bring back his enemies as ‘spoils’ (ἄγρᾱ, 64, 93) to his hut to torture. Athena frustrates this hunt, however, by sending him into the ‘nets of disaster’ (ἔρκη κακά, 60), and diverting his impetus onto animals (but not animals which regularly feature as a hunter’s prey). Odysseus’ mission, also sped by Athena (36–37), thus turns the (failed) hunter Ajax into the object of a new, successful hunt, marking the reversal in his situation that has taken place even before the play begins.

This theme is reprised at 866 at the reappearance of the Chorus. They, like Odysseus, have been searching for Ajax; but whereas he was responding to an act of violence inflicted by Ajax on third parties, they are attempting to prevent him inflicting a similarly bloody act on himself. Both are brought to their goal by a female: Athena in Odysseus’ case, Tecmessa in the Chorus’s. The Chorus do not employ hunting imagery, any more than Tecmessa had when she despatched them (803–811), probably because that would dehumanize Ajax; he remains their lord, after all. But the similarity of the situation allows the audience to draw a thematic connection between the two passages, which are thus linked even as the latter marks a new beginning.

As well as hunting, Athena’s opening words introduce the theme of friends and enemies. She describes Odysseus as ‘always on the hunt to seize some opportunity against his enemies’.²⁷ Simple enough, one might think: it was an axiom of Greek morality that one helped one’s friends and harmed one’s enemies.²⁸ The play illustrates that it is harder to act on this axiom than may at first appear. It turns out that the ἐχθροί in question is Ajax, one of Odysseus’ comrades-in-arms. The traditional φιλία of warriors has been rendered inoperative by Ajax’s assault on the army. Yet when Odysseus learns the truth and watches Ajax in his inglorious madness, he

²⁶ For the unifying effect of themes in this play, see Eucken (1991).

²⁷ Ἀεὶ ... /πεῖραν τιν’ ἐχθρῶν ἀρπάσαι θηρώμενον, 1–2.

²⁸ See e.g. Blundell (1989a) 26–31.

does not gloat or mock, but pities him, even though he is his enemy.²⁹ Pitying an enemy is not unprecedented in ancient literature,³⁰ but it is strikingly framed in this play. Athena had previously remarked that laughing at one's enemies is 'most sweet' (ἡδιστος, 79), while Ajax later assumes that his enemies are mocking him (379–382) and wishes that he could see them suffer (384, 387–391).

When Ajax later appears sitting amid the animal carcasses, he begins by expressing his strong sense of *φιλία* for his fellow-soldiers.³¹ But with the exception of the brief vocative *φίλοι* at 405b, the remainder of the lyric is addressed to people who are not present, to the gods, or even the land of Troy itself. This sense of isolation from *φίλοι* is accentuated in the following speech (430–480), formally a soliloquy despite the presence of Tecmessa and the Chorus. Ajax declares that he is *ἐχθρός* to the gods, the Trojans, and the Greeks (457–459): his actions have cut him off from mortal and immortal alike. In deciding to kill himself, he rejects even the bonds of *φιλία* which should tie him to Tecmessa and their son Eurysaces, despite the likelihood that this will leave the latter at the mercy of 'unfriendly guardians'.³²

Ajax's speech in the following episode, in which he deceives the Chorus and Tecmessa into thinking that he has changed his mind about killing himself, justifies this apparent volte-face by invoking a different maxim about friendship. Referring to his new attitude to Agamemnon and Menelaus, the leaders of the army whom he previously hated, he declares 'I have learned that my enemy should be hated as one whom I will later regard as a friend; while as for a friend, I shall want to give him help and assistance as someone who will not always remain so',³³ which alludes to a famous saying by the sixth-century sage Bias of Priene.³⁴ These words are full of irony. Ajax uses them to lie: his attitude has not changed, as the audience will already suspect and as will be confirmed in his suicide speech, when he curses the entire army (835–844). Yet he is seemingly unconcerned that by killing himself he is abandoning his *φίλοι* to potentially mortal peril, and thereby behaving not as a *φίλος* but an *ἐχθρός*. Going further back in time, his attack

²⁹ καίπερ ὄντα δυσμενῇ, 122.

³⁰ See e.g. Pelling (2005) 292–293 with 310n42.

³¹ 348–353, 356–361.

³² ὑπ' ὀφφανιστῶν μὴ φίλων, 512.

³³ ἐπίσταμαι γὰρ ἀρτίως ὅτι/ὅ τ' ἐχθρὸς ἡμῖν ἐς τοσόνδ' ἐχθαρτέος, ὡς καὶ φιλήσων αὐθις, ἐς τε τὸν φίλον/τοσαυθ' ὑπουργῶν ὠφελεῖν βουλήσομαι, /ὡς αἰὲν οὐ μενοῦντα, 678–682.

³⁴ '[Bias] would say that people should be prepared for their friends to turn into enemies [lit. 'should love as people who will hate'], since most people are wicked' (ἔλεγε ... φιλεῖν ὡς μισήσονται· τοὺς γὰρ πλείστους εἶναι κακοὺς, Diog. Laert. 1.5, 87).

on the army turned himself from their φίλος to their ἐχθρός; Menelaus later makes exactly this point, when he declares that ‘after hoping that we were bringing [Ajax] from home as an ally and friend for the Achaeans, we found in our dealings with him that he was a worse enemy than the Phrygians’.³⁵

The richest irony can be savoured at the end of the play, when Odysseus, Ajax’s enemy, secures burial for his old foe. Earlier the audience had seen his pity for Ajax; now he intervenes directly on his behalf. He acknowledges the enmity that existed between them, but argues that his valour and nobility nevertheless demand respect and honour.³⁶ In the stichomythia which follows his speech, Odysseus voices a similar idea to the maxim cited earlier by Ajax, linking the two passages and encouraging the audience to consider how the two characters react in different ways to it.³⁷ Agamemnon cannot believe that Odysseus is supporting an enemy,³⁸ and although in the end he concedes, he emphasizes that as far as he is concerned, Ajax is still a foe.³⁹ Odysseus achieves this remarkable breakthrough by articulating the justice of his cause and the mutability of human affairs; but he also stresses that Agamemnon would be doing a favour to him as a φίλος if he acted on his advice.⁴⁰ Ironically, the φιλία between Ajax’s two chief enemies turns out to be decisive in effecting his burial, further highlighting the unexpected consequences to which this quality can lead.

The theme is not yet exhausted. As we have seen, Teucer refuses Odysseus’ offer of assistance at the burial, in case this is unwelcome to Ajax. Odysseus can turn from enemy into friend, but Ajax, at least according to Teucer, is unwilling to reciprocate. Although Ajax previously described how friends can become enemies, and enemies friends, he fails to act himself on the second, more optimistic side of the maxim, preferring to dwell on

³⁵ ... αὐτὸν ἐλπίσαντες οὐκοθεν/ἄγειν Ἀχαιοὺς ξύμμαχόν τε καὶ φίλον, /ἐξηύρομεν ξυνόντες ἐχθίῳ Φρυγῶν, 1052–1054.

³⁶ 1336–1341, 1344–1346.

³⁷ ‘Indeed there are many now friends who will later be bitter foes’ (ἦ κάρτα πολλοὶ νῦν φίλοι καὶ θίς πικροί, 1359).

³⁸ ‘What ever will you do? Are you showing such respect to the corpse of an enemy?’ (τί ποτε ποιήσεις; ἐχθρὸν ᾧδ’ αἰδῆ νέκυν; 1356).

³⁹ ‘This man, both in this world and the next, will be most hateful to me. But you can do what you want’ (οὗτος δὲ κάκαί κανθάδ’ ὦν ἔμοιγ’ ὁμῶς/ἐχθιστος ἔσται. σοὶ δὲ δρᾶν ἔξεσθ’ ἃ χρεῖς, 1372–1373).

⁴⁰ ‘Stop! You are still the master, you know, if you let your friends vanquish you’ (παῦσαι· κρατεῖς τοι τῶν φίλων νικώμενος, 1353; transl. A.H. Sommerstein). Cf. Agamemnon’s expressed reason for agreeing to Odysseus’ request: ‘Well, be sure that I would do for you an even greater favour than this’ (ἀλλ’ εὖ γε μέντοι τοῦτ’ ἐπίστασ’, ὡς ἐγὼ/σοὶ μὲν νέμοιμ’ ἂν τῆσδε καὶ μείζω χάριν, 1370–1371).

the cynical first part. From the start of the play until its end, the differing attitudes which he and other characters express towards friendship and enmity are of central importance in determining the audience's reactions to them.⁴¹

A third theme with a significant function is that of fathers and sons. Ajax's father, Telamon, had sacked Troy (with Heracles) in the previous generation (434–436). Part of Ajax's grief at failing to be awarded the Arms of Achilles lies in his failure to emulate his father's deeds (437–440). In the *Iliad*, when Achilles was dishonoured by the Greeks he announced that he would return home; no such recourse is available to Ajax, since he cannot bear the thought of having to look his father in the eye.⁴² In this speech Telamon is the only member of his family whom he mentions. Tecmessa's reply encourages him to consider a wider range of relationships and responsibilities—one of which is his responsibility for his son, Eurysaces. Ajax, too, is a father, and by killing himself partly as a result of failure to match the status of his father, he will be abandoning the son who still relies on his protection.⁴³ Telamon does feature in her speech, but as a weak and pitiable old man, not the dread, matchless figure of Ajax's imagination.

In response Ajax does show a certain concern for his son's fate: his half-brother, Teucer, will henceforth look after him, although he is presently away and the boy may be in imminent peril (560–564). He prays for his son's success, hoping that he will be 'more fortunate than [his] father, but in all other respects the same'.⁴⁴ Ajax has only just lamented his failure to reach the standard attained by his father, Telamon; this prayer implies that he regards this failure simply as a piece of bad fortune, not something bound up with his own character, attitudes, and actions. Nor indeed does he wish to be surpassed by his son, as he is surpassed by his father. Many in the audience will have contrasted Hector's more generous prayer for his son Astyanax in the *Iliad*: 'And may someone say, "This man is much better than his father", as he comes back from conflict'.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Cf. Knox (1961) 10 = (1979) 133: 'in time, friends turn into enemies and enemies into friends. The *Ajax* itself is a bewildering panorama of such changed and changing relationships'. See also Goldhill (1986) 85–88.

⁴² Hom. *Il.* 9.356–367; *Aj.* 462–466.

⁴³ 499, 510–513.

⁴⁴ ὦ παῖ, γένοιτο πατρός εὐτυχέστερος/τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ὁμοῖος, 550–551.

⁴⁵ καὶ ποτέ τις εἴποι "πατρός γ' ὅδε πολλὸν ἀμείνων"/ἐκ πολέμου ἀνιόντα, Hom. *Il.* 6.479–480. The encounter between Hector and Andromache, from which this prayer is taken, is frequently alluded to in the scene from *Ajax*.

New light is thrown on the relationship between Ajax and Telamon in the Messenger's speech, as discussed above. In response to Telamon's advice that he should 'desire to triumph with the spear, but to triumph always with a god's help',⁴⁶ Ajax makes an 'arrogant and mad' response: 'Father, with the gods even a worthless man can acquire success. I am confident that I will win this glory even without them'.⁴⁷ Telamon no longer represents simply a standard of valour which Ajax has failed to match: he turns out to be a giver of wise advice which Ajax has failed to heed. If Ajax had not treated his father's words, and Athena's too, with contempt, he might now be in a position to emulate him instead of being crushed by disgrace.

This theme does not come to an end with Ajax's death. When Teucer delivers his lament over the body of his half-brother, his thoughts too naturally turn to Telamon, his father as well as Ajax's (1008). He imagines his reaction not to news of his son's death, but to his other son's return: he describes at length the insults which he, Teucer, will receive as a result of his 'betrayal' of his brother (1008–1021).⁴⁸ The passage recalls not only Ajax's attitude to his father, but more particularly the earlier passage in which Ajax had explained why he could not return home to Telamon in disgrace (460–466). This transferral of apprehension underlines how Ajax's suicide has left all kinds of issues unresolved: now it is Teucer who has failed his father and must contemplate his wrath.

This is not Teucer's last word on the subject. Faced with Agamemnon's contempt for his allegedly barbarian origin (1259–1263), Teucer retorts by boasting of his parentage. Telamon's great deeds at Troy now become a subject of pride for his son (1299–1303), rather than an unmatchable standard. Agamemnon's father, by contrast, is associated with the unspeakable crime of the dreadful banquet, in which Thyestes unsuspectingly consumed the bodies of his own children (1293–1295). As the play moves towards its conclusion, the relationship between fathers and sons now at last turns in favour of Ajax's house. During this exchange, and indeed for the last 250 lines of the play, Eurysaces is clasping his father's body, where Teucer has directed him to remain as a supplicant (1171–1181). Having abandoned his son in life, Ajax is at least protecting him in death. The reversal of this

⁴⁶ "τέκνον, δορι/ βούλου κρατεῖν μέν, σὺν θεῶ δ' αἰεὶ κρατεῖν", 764–765.

⁴⁷ ὁ δ' ὑψικόμπως κάφρόνως ἡμείψατο, / "πάτερ, θεοῖς μὲν κἄν ὁ μὴδὲν ὦν ὁμοῦ/κράτος κατακτῆσαι τ'· ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ δίχα/κείνων πέποιθα τοῦτ' ἐπισπάσειν κλέος", 766–769.

⁴⁸ By comparison, his reference to more immediate troubles at Troy lasts less than three lines (1021–1023).

thematic idea contributes to the rehabilitation of Ajax which the audience witness in the closing scenes.

Further themes could be identified,⁴⁹ but the three discussed above should be enough to establish the point that themes are used to connect different parts of the play, both before and after the suicide. As a particular idea recurs in varying forms, the audience is encouraged to set later recurrences alongside earlier ones as they assess the characters; each instance makes sense in isolation, but means more when set in a wider context. Thus in his employment of connecting themes, as well as his presentation of the characters and the handling of the structure, Sophocles ensures that the drama forms a satisfying unity. The departure of the dominating figure at such a relatively early point presented Sophocles with a dramaturgical challenge, which he more than met by deftly employing several of the weapons in his creative armoury.

⁴⁹ For example, Hesk (2003) 48 analyzes how the ideas of bigness and smallness recur throughout the play, particularly with regard to Ajax.

ELECTRA

E.M. Griffiths

From the outstretched arms of mourners in Geometric art to the contemplative figures on classical grave *stelai*, funerary art gives us some insight into the way grief and mourning were experienced in the ancient world. Analysis of white figure *lekythoi* led Oakley to conclude that the contemplative iconography of the classical period, with its insistence on ritual process, provided comfort to grieving relatives, assuring them that 'everything would be alright' both during and after the death and burial or cremation.¹ This ritual process has gone seriously awry in Sophocles' *Electra*; we see both the immediate raw grief of a new loss when Electra and Clytaemestra react to the news of Orestes' death, intermingled with the protracted long mourning for Agamemnon. The ritual process of offering libations achieves no resolution, and rather than helping Electra to reach a point of acceptance, it only adds insult to her festering grief, as it morphs into hatred and obsession. Sophocles' treatment of this well-known myth has enjoyed an enduring popularity with critics and audiences, although strikingly different reasons for that popularity can be adduced in different social and cultural settings.

Winnington-Ingram famously warned of the dark intentions of the 'hero-worshippers' and 'pietists' who would shape Sophoclean characters to their own moral codes, noting the seductive lure of Victorian ideas of heroic nobility.² From the late nineteenth century attention has moved away from the nobility of Electra's suffering, and focused instead on the play as an exploration of the extreme and ugly aspects of human nature. In 2009 Goldhill and Hall considered the critical arena of Sophoclean scholarship, and identified four key areas of debate: the relationship between drama and democracy; the role of performance; the use of language; and the process of tradition or reception of Sophocles' work. In this article, I will examine how each of these approaches is relevant to our understanding of *Electra* today and consider how the play's continued popularity is built upon a balance of renegotiation and transhistorical significance.

¹ Oakley (2004).

² Winnington-Ingram (1980) 13.

1. *The Mythology of Matricide*

The story of how Electra and Orestes killed their mother to avenge their father was well-known in the fifth century BC, and the Aeschylean version, the central drama of the *Oresteia* trilogy of 458 BC, provided a benchmark against which later treatments may well have been evaluated. It may be a measure of the myth's early popularity, or simply a peculiarity of transmission that we have treatments of the myth by each of the three great tragedians (Euripides' play survived only as part of the alphabetic manuscript).³ As we do not know the date of production for either Sophocles or Euripides' plays we cannot judge whether one playwright was influenced by the approach of the other (or by different versions of the myth told by other poets). Recent criticism has generally left the question of priority open, often agreeing with Finglass that the search for a definitive answer is fruitless.⁴ Euripides' approach to the Aeschylean precedent was to challenge the old formulations, introducing new characters and questioning key elements of the story such as the recognition between Electra and Orestes.⁵ Sophocles' take on the myth seems to begin from a very different ethical framework in which the murder of Clytaemestra is not the horrific act which so terrified the characters of Aeschylus' play. We see an elaborate, calculating plan employed by Orestes to kill his mother, as well as a passionate determination from Electra to achieve the same end when she believes Orestes is dead. Although Electra's passion is disturbing, the successful act of matricide may appear more disturbing because of the dispassionate manner Orestes displays. This apparent shift in emphasis from the Aeschylean version has caused generations of critics to question whether Sophocles intended his audience to take a particular stance on the matricide, either reacting in horror to the apparent lack of natural feeling expressed by Orestes, or siding with him entirely, viewing the murder of Clytaemestra as an unproblematic act of justice.⁶ However we may view the narrative of Sophocles' play, there is no escaping from the fact that in fifth-century Athens matricide was a violation of multiple social and natural laws, a homicide which attracted pollution, and a matter for honour and revenge within a family.⁷ In

³ See Zuntz (2011) 102–109.

⁴ Finglass (2007) 1–4.

⁵ See Papadimitropoulos (2008) on Euripidean innovation in the myth.

⁶ Finglass (2007) has provided a thoughtful analysis of the critical division between 'optimists' and 'pessimists' in his introduction to his commentary on the play.

⁷ See Cantarella (2005) on the construction of matricide in fifth-century Athenian law.

Aeschylus's *Choephoroi* the horror of the act is placed in the foreground; even with the injunction from Apollo, Orestes still baulks at the physical act. Although he takes the prescribed revenge for Agamemnon, that does not give him immunity from the consequences of matricide, and the Furies arrive as if they are part of a natural pattern of cause and effect. There are no Furies at the end of Sophocles' play. Instead we have a greater emphasis on the horror of matricidal *intention*, as exemplified by Electra. It is impossible to know whether Sophocles intended his play to present a clear moral answer, not only because of the hidden nature of authorial intent, but because Sophocles has constructed a drama with dissonant voices in the text, and a narrative which raises issues of language and politics. Key differences are the occluded role of the Delphic Oracle, the lack of hesitation shown by Orestes, and the layering of political and social concerns. The absence of the Furies has suggested to some that Sophocles intended this to be the end of the story, a satisfactory end to the family curse without recourse to Athenian justice or a battle of old and new gods. We should note, however, that the Sophoclean world view does not require an immediate reaction to determine the ethical status of an act. In *Oedipus Tyrannus* Thebes is troubled by a miasmic plague many years after Oedipus committed parricide, so there is no reason to suppose that Sophocles could not have conceived of a delayed response to the matricide, falling outside the scope of this play.⁸ Similarly, although in the *Oresteia* the appearance of the Furies is presented as an almost automatic consequence of familial bloodshed, this is not necessarily the case elsewhere. In the story of Alcmaeon who killed his mother Eriphyle for her treachery, the Furies are summoned by Eriphyle who places a curse on her son. (A coherent narrative is provided in Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* 3.7.3–8, but for a survey of the early Greek evidence, including the fragmentary plays, see Gantz 1993, II. 524–526. We should also note that in Sophocles' play, the story of Alcmaeon is referred to obliquely, noting how Eriphyle was killed for her treachery because there was 'someone to care', i.e. Alcmaeon, v. 846.⁹) The appearance of Clytaemnestra's ghost in the *Oresteia* may suggest that these Furies too are imagined as direct responders to a call for justice, rather than agents of automatic punishment. Kells argued that Sophocles' play does not condone or justify the matricide, but rather leaves the audience with 'a kind of suspended

⁸ Cf. Dunn (1996a) on different mechanisms of closure in Euripidean drama.

⁹ On the parallels between the stories of Orestes and Alcmaeon, see further Delcourt (1959).

abhorrence'.¹⁰ For Kells, the central focus of the play is Clytaemestra's tragic cry of maternal grief when she believes Orestes to be dead, an apparent change of heart which reveals her to be a tragic character deserving our sympathy.

If we put the *Oresteia* to one side and consider how the story fits into a wider mythological tradition, we may gain different perspectives, one of which will be developed as a closing argument to this article. Matricide is not a simple mythological motif. Although Kristeva argued for the concept of 'psychical matricide', a process underlying all human interaction, the motif is not widespread in world myth;¹¹ the Babylonian creation myth of the Enuma Elish does contain the story that Marduk killed his own mother Tiamat, but this is often viewed as symbolic cosmic action more than a personal choice. The motif of matricide can also be related to ideas of punishment for unnatural behaviour in other mythological patterns such that of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*,¹² but in the Greek world the act of matricide is normally viewed as an unnatural act. In Sophocles' version of the story, despite the physicality of many scenes, there is a more mannered approach to the motivation for matricide. There is a disturbing lack of clarity about Orestes' motivation, and any possible injunctions from the Delphic Oracle, and a far greater focus on Electra's state of mind, and her confused attempts to achieve her goal, which seems to be the death of Aegisthus rather than the more personal act of matricide.

2. Family and Gender

When Electra believes that Orestes is dead she takes on the role of the avenger, planning to murder Clytaemestra and Aegisthus, and she puts aside her earlier conflict with her sister, Chrysothemis; from lines 950 onwards, Electra speaks frequently of the two sisters as a united pair, using dual forms to emphasize their shared task of avenging their father. In the context of Greek family honour, this act can be viewed as the necessary assumption of the role of avenger, when there were no male family members left to take action. However, by introducing the character of Chrysothemis early in the drama Sophocles has provided another standard by which to

¹⁰ Kells (1971) 7.

¹¹ Stone (2011) on world myth; Kristeva (1989) 27–28 on the idea of matricide seen in terms of psychoanalytical post-Freudian analysis.

¹² See Shea (2001).

judge Electra's behaviour. Chrysothemis suffers because of the family situation but balances her outrage and desire for justice against other factors, such as the need for self-preservation, and suggests that Agamemnon would forgive her for not taking action (400). By contrast, Electra's single-minded approach at the start of the play has only weakened her position, as she is threatened with a living tomb, to be incarcerated in a cave as a punishment for her behaviour. We should not view Chrysothemis' attitude as one of cowardice, although the discourse of bravery and cowardice is present throughout the play.¹³ In the earlier debates between the two sisters, the focus was on what is morally acceptable (395 ff.), and Chrysothemis is open to listen to the merits of her sister's position although she remains cautious, speaking in terms of necessity and benefit (943–946). We see that the sisters are in a very similar situation, and that the act of matricide may be necessary, but there are different ways of approaching the situation; Chrysothemis is aware of the social roles placed on women, even when she contemplates defying them. For Electra, there is no defined pattern of cause and effect which necessitates her behaviour, which is in many ways counterproductive, an unthinking outburst of pain rather than a clear strategy similar to that employed by Orestes. Unable to take action, her emotions have turned inward. We see the long years have taken their toll, a combination of grief, unmet hopes, and a great sense of injustice. In Aeschylus, the view of justice expressed is often a key characterizing feature, but in Sophocles' version this has become a secondary issue for Electra. She is driven not by a desire for justice, but for vengeance, the desire not to put right a wrong, but to inflict suffering on others.

The problem of hostility within a family was a frequent trope of Greek tragedy,¹⁴ but this play seems to emphasize hostility between women. Although Clytaemestra and Electra both display masculine attributes, and Electra herself several times expresses a wish for more masculine behaviour (see, for example, line 938 her call for *andreia*), there is nonetheless a strong focus on patterns of female interaction, and many critics have seen the play as an exploration of gender dynamics, (see, for example, Wheeler's analysis, 'the suggestion that Sophocles himself wished to use the character of his heroine to explore issues surrounding contemporary gender-ideologies seems very plausible').¹⁵ The mother-daughter relationship has

¹³ Chaston (2010) 17–33.

¹⁴ See Belfiore (2000) on *philia* in tragedy.

¹⁵ Wheeler (2003) 378.

received considerable attention, with many critics, including Wheeler, noting that Clytaemestra and Electra display very similar patterns of behaviour. Throughout the play the mother-daughter relationship is a source of dramatic tension, particularly when viewed through the eyes of the Chorus.¹⁶ Even when she believes that Orestes is dead, and that she has been freed from the fear of his vengeance, Clytaemestra suggests that Electra always posed the greater threat to her peace of mind (773). For modern critics, the inevitable link at this point is to the post-Freudian idea of the 'Electra complex', the term coined by Jung to describe a female parallel to the Oedipus complex, whereby a daughter experiences hatred of the mother combined with an obsessive sexual attachment to the father. Some critics have seen precisely this dynamic in the play,¹⁷ and a culturally specific interpretation can also be advanced; as she is unmarried, Electra's sexuality is untamed and dangerous, her extreme behaviour could be classified in ancient medical terminology as the damage caused by her failure to reach the status of a mature woman.¹⁸ We should note, however, that Chrysothemis too is unmarried and facing the prospect of becoming an old maid (962) and yet she seems to suffer no similar ill effects from her virginity.¹⁹ Although Electra herself refers frequently to the paradigm of female identity through marriage, it may be that her identity is shaped less by mortal, social concerns than by cosmic ideals which can be figured as feminine, such as those of Furies. The Chorus expect a Fury to wreak havoc in the house because of the murder of Agamemnon (489 ff.) and the description they give of the violent, passionate deity figures Electra as a manifestation of this energy. She is perhaps at her most coherent when she expects to be doing the deed herself, and shows more signs of madness when Orestes takes on that role of avenger, and the energy of the Fury loses its focus. Electra accepts the mantle of matricide, but her intention is frustrated, the energy dissipated, and the powerful physical awareness which Electra displays does not seem to affect Orestes, who approaches the act with a cool head. Although this aspect is particularly striking for modern audiences familiar with the angst experienced by characters in the *Oresteia*, the lack of emotion from Orestes

¹⁶ See Ierulli (1993) on the Chorus of the play.

¹⁷ Wheeler (2003).

¹⁸ For the complexities of Greek ideas on female sexuality, see King (1983).

¹⁹ We should note, however, that there is presumed to be an age difference between the two sisters, so that Electra's virginity may be taken as of longer duration, and hence more dangerous.

is bound to be an important factor in the story. Not only does Orestes not balk at the physical act of matricide, but he appears to fear no consequences. Although the Chorus earlier in the play spoke about a Fury coming to avenge the murder of Agamemnon, they close the play with no apparent expectation that the matricide will provoke a similar response. This seems to be the end of the cycle of violence rather than the next turning of the wheel. For an Athenian audience, regardless of the morality of the act, the question of pollution must have remained, so the silence on this issue is surprising.

3. *Democracy and Drama*

One solution to the problem might be if the play is not so much about matricide, but about political power. If Clytaemestra and Aegisthus are to be viewed as tyrants first and foremost, and blood relatives second, then the murder sits more easily in the discourse of tyrannicide than of matricide. The story of how Harmodius and Aristogeiton brought down the Athenian tyranny of the Peisistratids in the late sixth century remained an important historical moment for Athenian self-image and ideology.²⁰ Several recent analyses of the play have highlighted the overt political vocabulary Sophocles employs, suggesting that the language creates an atmosphere which would have been viewed as hostile to the democratic views of the original fifth-century audience. Juffras argues for the prevalence of the tyrannicide motif, particularly when Electra speaks of the honours she and Chrysothemis will gain if they kill Clytaemestra and Aegisthus; this underlying political pattern for Juffras further explains why the murder of Aegisthus is more significant than the matricide. Dunn analyses the contextualization at the start of the play, arguing that the Paedagogus introduces the physical space as a political one in need of change. Konstan has suggested that if the play was produced in 410 BC, then it followed the overthrow of the oligarchy of the Four Hundred, so a political reading of the story makes more sense; Sophocles may have intended the play as a personal response to a dark time in Athens in which he himself had played a part.²¹

While this interpretation remains speculative due to uncertainty about the date of first production, a broadly political interpretation of the play is

²⁰ Podlecki (1966d).

²¹ Konstan (2008).

certainly suggested by the prominent language used.²² The conflict between Electra and Chrysothemis is constructed as a series of debates about the nature of what is good, and the ethics of the doctrine that 'might equals right'.²³ The *agon* between Clytaemestra and Electra uses highly rhetorical formulations more suited to a legal or political arena than a domestic family conflict.²⁴ Throughout the play language is shown to be anything but a simple method of communication, and *logos*, in the sense of narrative, is indeed proved to be powerful: as the Chorus say, 'It can change everything!' (415). Not only does the fictional *logos* of Orestes' death facilitate the planned revenge, but it provokes a devastating emotional collapse when Electra believes her brother is dead.

The political motif of tyrannicide might suggest that the play was intended to end on a positive note of closure, and that the Chorus' final words about Orestes reaching 'freedom' are a straightforward comment. The paradigm may provide a moral and legal justification for the murders, just as the Areopagus court resolves the cycle of vengeance at the end of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. However, critics have been wary of accepting this idea; even in Finglass' commentary, which generally takes a middle way through the issue, the discussion of the final scenes tends more to the pessimistic side of the debate, arguing that the audience would find it difficult to sympathize with Orestes' words and behaviour, however much Aegisthus might seem an odious villain.²⁵ Several factors tell against an interpretation of the play as a straightforward triumph of justice over tyranny. Firstly, the idea of political cunning and the manipulation of language is often a negative one in tragedy.²⁶ Orestes, the great politician, may provoke feelings of distrust in the original audience, not least because Electra's own skill in rhetoric is frequently condemned in the play. Orestes' attitude towards Electra has often been viewed as heartless, and he demonstrates little human feeling towards his mother.²⁷ The corollary of this is that if we view Clytaemestra as a

²² We may also note that the 2010 production of the play at the Getty in Los Angeles was an explicitly political play prompting one critic to note 'You can't help but think of an embassy under siege, or miss the parallel to Eva Peron, as, up above, the glamorous Queen Clytemnestra ... waxes magnanimous to her subjects below'. B. Verini, (<http://www.variety.com/review/VE117943524>).

²³ On the philosophical and political colourings of this idea, see Kells (1971) *ad* 340.

²⁴ See Budelmann (2000a).

²⁵ Finglass (2007).

²⁶ See Hesk (2000) on deception and political status in Athens.

²⁷ See Montgomery-Griffiths (2011) 229 on the chilling expression at 1177 which she translates 'Is there here image of yours that of the famed Electra?'.

political casualty, we must downplay the apparent strength of her emotional response as a mother. At several times in the play she appears to express strong maternal feelings, not least when she believes Orestes is dead. We may believe, with Electra, that these emotions are fake, a façade to cover her true feelings, but we should be wary of this. An appeal to the sanctity of motherhood can be viewed as a cynical ploy, and it certainly seems to be undermined in Aeschylus' version where the force of Clytaemestra's appeal to the breast that nourished Orestes is tempered by the previous comments of the nurse who actually cared for the baby. In Sophocles' play, the maternal feelings of Clytaemestra are glimpsed in several different contexts, relating to her children both from Agamemnon and from Aegisthus, but when she responds to the apparent death of Orestes there is no obvious reason for her to disguise her true feelings. She readily admits that Orestes' death is to her benefit, removing a threat; as an audience for her grief Electra is unlikely to be moved, and the Paedagogus feigns dismay at her apparent grief which may threaten Orestes' scheme.

A further question remains: if the murder of Clytaemestra and Aegisthus is a tyrannicide, then does that end the cycle of family violence, the spectre which Aegisthus raises as he faces his death? It has been suggested that the Furies mentioned by the Chorus are in effect Electra and Orestes themselves, or that Electra is mad towards the end of the play, making manifest the forces which will now turn against Orestes. The difficulty with this is that the madness seems to come not from the murder of Clytaemestra, but before it, as a progression of the grief Electra feels, rather than a manifestation of guilt over matricide. The final choral lines speak of how Orestes has reached a state of freedom, which might suggest a positive outcome in line with democratic ideology, but we should not forget that although the Athenian tyrants were deposed, the tyrant-killers themselves, Harmodius and Aristogeiton still suffered the consequences of their actions, through death or torture. The paradigm does not guarantee that Orestes will get off scot-free.

4. Language and Metatheatre

The question of political relevance raises the problem of how far the original audience would have related the ideas to their own experience. Although the language of the play frequently suggests a fifth-century political framework, the use of language is also highly elusive and resists simple interpretation. Detailed linguistic analysis of the play has produced a number of strong

lines of interpretation; Budelmann focuses on the problems of communication, while Wissman has shown how the vocabulary of courage and cowardice is constructed, and Nooter has argued that *Electra* is able to manipulate linguistic registers from lament to sophisticated rhetoric to shape the flow of events in the play.²⁸ The emphasis on words, language, and narrative in the play draws attention to the status of the play as fiction. Ringer's analysis of the urn as a significant stage object highlighted the metatheatrical issues of the play, suggesting that the urn is a symbol for the play as a whole, an empty fiction.²⁹ The audience recognizes the urn as a prop in the Paedagogus' fiction, and by extension realizes the artificiality of the prop in the play and then of the drama itself. Chaston's analysis of the interplay of physical object and cognitive engagement has further developed the idea that the urn plays multiple roles for characters and for the audience of the play.³⁰ The idea of metatheatre in relation to tragedy was popular in classical scholarship in the late twentieth century, but faced criticism about lack of precision in terminology and applicability.³¹ Dunn's 2010 analysis of metatheatre in Greek tragedy suggests a different way of applying the theories, which goes beyond the theatricality of life/theatricality of theatre debate, and instead looks at how the artifice of tragedy speaks to transcendent concerns including anxieties about the role of the gods.³² There are no gods in Sophocles' *Electra*, so the metatheatrical use of the urn may take us beyond the mortal sphere, the object focusing attention and forcing action in a way that language cannot. The absence of the divine in Sophocles' play has often been discussed in terms of Apollo's shadowing figure in the background to the play, despite frequent references to the god, there remains a disturbing lack of clarity about the instructions which Orestes received at Delphi.³³ If we apply a metaphysical understanding of metatheatre to the play, we may find different ideas whereby the metatheatre highlights the lack of divine presence, and perhaps encourages the audience to reflect on their own reliance on the gods. Whether this dynamic makes the audience more or less likely to relate the *political* aspects to their own experience is open to question. The immediate political message is problematized by two further issues, the role of gender and the question of language. Women

²⁸ Budelmann (2000a); Nooter (2011); Wissman (1997).

²⁹ Ringer (1998).

³⁰ Chaston (2010) 13–77.

³¹ See Rosenmeyer (2002) for the reaction against metatheatrical analysis.

³² Dunn (2010).

³³ See discussion of the role of Apollo in the play, MacLeod (2001).

were not part of the political landscape for classical Athenians, except in their religious roles.³⁴ In *Electra*, however, gender roles are repeatedly questioned; Chrysothemis and Electra contemplate taking on the male role of avenger, and the debate between Clytaemestra and Electra is a strange mixture of masculine language addressing feminine concerns. Could the men of the original fifth-century audience have viewed these political debates as relevant to them, either by hearing an underlying masculine discourse conducted by the male actors, or by viewing women as capable of having such debates in extremis? If such a process of audience contemplation did occur, then it moves the play closer to the ideas of 'gender performativity' introduced by Butler, and suggests that Sophocles' handling of gender issues was even more radical than is often assumed.³⁵ As gender is open to negotiation throughout the play, so too there are multiple views of the value and utility of language and the value of different linguistic registers, from the high emotion of lament to the pragmatic rhetorical and philosophical language. The philosophical problems of the play and the blurred boundaries of gender all suggest that language and metatheatre are closely interrelated, and as a text *Electra* demands a focus on literary and linguistic analysis and the role of drama as a theoretical crucible. However, as Goldhill and Hall note,³⁶ it is in performance criticism that many of the most striking developments in Sophoclean scholarship are currently being developed, and scholarship on *Electra* is no exception.

5. *Performance Issues*

From the earliest reception of the play, the urn has proved a focus of personal engagement and theatrical controversy. The third-century actor, Polus, was lauded for his performance of Electra, when he used an urn containing the ashes of his own son, a further blurring of the boundaries between play and player.³⁷ In more recent times, the play has been well served by theatrical attention, which has produced a great many striking productions, as well as a considerable body of critical self-reflection. In 1996 Dunn edited a collection of articles under the title 'Electra in Performance', based on a conference in Northwestern University exploring ideas

³⁴ On the roles of women in Greek religion, see Dillon (2002).

³⁵ Butler (1990).

³⁶ Goldhill/Hall (2009).

³⁷ Holford-Strevens (2005); Duncan (2005).

of performance criticism. In the preface Dunn draws out some of the key threads that developed in the course of the conference, including the emphasis on spatial dynamics in the play, a theme Dunn developed further in later work on political implications of the city tour given by the Paedagogus (as noted above).³⁸ McDonald's review piece at the close of the 1996 volume highlighted the way performance can change our view of characters and scenes such that our understanding of key issues is fundamentally altered.³⁹

Some of the most talented actresses of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have taken on the role of Electra, and have explored how the experience of playing the character provides an actor with a new set of perspectives.⁴⁰ Montgomery Griffiths reflected on the physical and emotional toll this role takes on an actress, and emphasized the way that Electra relives her trauma, particularly through starvation and the denial of her own physical needs: 'Through this denial of her need, Electra manages to *perform* her body as a subversion of the dominant culture of her mother and Aegisthus: a visual signifier of her resistance and will.'⁴¹ On this reading of the play, there can be no resolution for Electra, because she is trapped in a pathological response to the death of her father; 'She lives in a never-ending, always coming-into-being condition of the trauma'.⁴² Furthermore, Montgomery Griffiths suggests there is an inevitable hangover for the actress who has taken part in a blurring of identity and necessarily taken on some of the experience of that trauma.

The role of Electra has been seen as a theatrical challenge for the modern actress but as Hazel notes, there has yet to be an outstanding male actor wishing to take on the role, in the way that actresses have taken on the meaty roles of Shakespearean tragic heroes.⁴³ This may be a fruitful avenue for the development of further performance criticism on the play, as the ideas of physicality and gender may be reconfigured through the body of a male actor instead of a female one. The text of the play demands a sophisticated literary and linguistic analysis as discussed above, and when we add consideration of somatic elements through performance, it becomes increasingly difficult to form any objective opinion about the play, as it

³⁸ Dunn (2006).

³⁹ McDonald (1996b).

⁴⁰ See, for example, Ewans (2000b).

⁴¹ Montgomery Griffiths (2011) 238.

⁴² Montgomery Griffiths (2011) 234.

⁴³ Hazel (2001).

reflects our own views back at us. A further complication for modern audiences is that Sophocles' treatment of the myth was also one of the most powerful influences on later instantiations of the myth, and the popularity of the play itself has helped its refraction in opera, music, and visual arts.⁴⁴ Moving into the second decade of the twenty-first century, any audience, reader or performer brings a wide range of material to the play, from the ideas of Freudian psychoanalysis and the striking image of Electra at the tomb of Agamemnon painted by Frederick Leighton to the comic book images of the Marvel character Elektra who gives a very different dynamic to the name.⁴⁵ In performance and scholarship *Electra* continues to dominate thinking about Sophocles Greek tragedy as a whole, even though the play contains very few characters to which we can immediately relate, and the whole play may originally have been keyed to a specific set of political circumstances, its tension created by the Athenian opposition of tyranny and democracy, a suggestion which, as Konstan notes, does not help to explain the enduring appeal of the play.⁴⁶

6. *Returning to Life*

What, then, are we to make of this continued interest in the play? Is it an indication of universality, that we can all respond to the raw emotion of the play by virtue of our simple mortality? Or is it that the rich texture of the play offers something new to each viewer and reader, so the play is reborn each time? Many powerful new translations of the play have been produced in recent years catering to different audiences,⁴⁷ and in many cases multiplying their significance through production, reflecting Hardwick's idea that every performance 'is a new translation'.⁴⁸ The genre itself has enjoyed a renaissance, a move sometimes viewed as a direct response to the problems of modern times: 'Translated, adapted, staged, sung, danced, parodied, filmed, enacted, Greek tragedy has proved magnetic to writers and directors searching for new ways in which to pose questions to contemporary society and to push back the boundaries of theatre. The mythical, dysfunctional,

⁴⁴ See Lloyd (2005), chap. 5 on the *Nachleben* of the play.

⁴⁵ On the role of Marvel comics in redefining ideas of heroism, see Reynolds (1992); Weiner (2011).

⁴⁶ Konstan (2008) 79.

⁴⁷ Notable translations accompanied by reflection on the play have been produced by Carson (2001), and more recently Roisman (2008).

⁴⁸ Hardwick (2000a).

conflicted world portrayed in the archetypal plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides has become one of the most important cultural and aesthetic prisms through which the real, dysfunctional, conflicted world of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries has refracted its own image'.⁴⁹ The world of Sophocles' *Electra* certainly shows us a 'dysfunctional, conflicted world' and has inspired much scholarly debate. In such a welter of thoughtful opinions, it may seem foolhardy to offer any new suggestion, but fortune favours the brave, so I would like to conclude by offering one suggestion about the continued popularity of the play, and the central problem of Orestes' guilt. I would suggest that there is an extra underlying mythological pattern behind Sophocles' drama, one which may suggest that Orestes is in the clear at the end of the play, not because of any social or moral practice, but because the issue of his identity has become blurred such that he is not properly himself.

The constant narrative attention to the grief and intentions of Electra focuses our attention on the question of what she really wants, how can this process of protracted mourning for Agamemnon be resolved. If we map her mental state on to the stages of grief model of Kübler-Ross we see that Electra is stuck in the stages of denial and bargaining, fixated on the past.⁵⁰ She wants the impossible, that Agamemnon should return to life. Although this wish may be an expected part of grief, the formulation of the wish in Sophocles is interesting in light of how Orestes himself returns. Although Electra says that she is not mad enough to believe that the dead could really return to life, she speculates on the idea several times (1136 ff.; 1361 ff.), and towards the end of the play seems to believe that she does actually see him. There is the idea that he should appear from the earth (453) expressed by Electra, and the idea that he should return from the marshy ground of the underworld (137 ff.) expressed by the Chorus, but the most powerful image of a revenant is that of Clytaemnestra's dream where she envisages Agamemnon restored to life planting his sceptre in the hearth, from which the sapling springs up.⁵¹ The image evokes ideas of sovereignty, and the rebirth of the tree, but by centring on the hearth where Agamemnon was killed it also raises the spectre of a figure returning from the ashes

⁴⁹ Hall (2004) 2.

⁵⁰ On Electra's obsession with the past and the contrasting position of Orestes, see Kyr-iakou (2011) 315–370. Kübler-Ross (1969) suggests five interlocking aspects of grief: 'Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance'.

⁵¹ See Bowman (1997) on the role of the prophecy within the play.

of a fire, coming back into light, bringing life from the ashes.⁵² This is in one sense exactly what Orestes does, when the grief directed at the urn transfers his identity from the ashes to the flesh and blood mortal man, achieving the result he had requested, that he should 'flash out, alive, like a star against my enemies' (65–66). The mythological pattern this suggests is that of the phoenix, the mythical bird reborn from the ashes of its own funeral pyre, and this, I suggest, is one of the paradigms lurking behind Sophocles' narrative.

The myth of the phoenix is not well attested in classical Greek sources, although it appears as early as Hesiod (fr. 304), and a full narrative history has traditionally been reconstructed with borrowed material from later accounts and from the similar story of the Egyptian *benu*. Although this cross-cultural identification has a strong pedigree, as Herodotus himself discussed the Egyptian myth in Book 2 of his *Histories*, more recent scholarship has suggested that the Greek phoenix was *not* a development from the Egyptian myth, but rather a parallel myth which was then cross-fertilized. Van Den Broek's monumental study of the phoenix argues that from its earliest appearances, the phoenix was essentially a symbol rather than a phenomenon of natural history: '... it can only be concluded that the phoenix fulfilled an important function with regard to human existence. It was primarily a symbol indicative of a reality beyond that of the individual but including him and forming the true basis of his existence'.⁵³ The myth of the phoenix may contain several different details, but the central premise is that the old bird dies and in the process the new bird is born. This process can be variously described, involving aromatic herbs, or a possible intermediate stage where the corpse is transformed into a worm, but the dominant versions insist that it is through fire that the transformation occurs, so that the new phoenix is born from the ashes. This return to life echoes the imagery of Clytaemestra's dream when Agamemnon should rise from the hearth, and may also be suggested by Electra's formulation of Agamemnon returning from the 'earth' (the word *konos* at 435 can mean either the 'sandy earth' or 'ash'). Electra's wish is granted when the ashes of the false urn lead to the presence of Orestes. When Orestes is revealed as alive, he has already been

⁵² A detail of the language may further suggest this interpretation, but is debatable because of textual problems. The offerings carried by Chrysothemis should be liquid, but are described at 405 as *empura*, objects for burning. The emendation suggested by Broadhead that the offerings are for a 'pyre' would have introduced a similar image, if Agamemnon's tomb was envisaged as a pyre (Kells 1971 *ad* 405).

⁵³ Van de Broek (1972) 9.

given many of the rites of the dead (as is often noted in relation to Euripides' play, the question of recognition in the myth is about ritual as much as genetic predisposition to hair colour). The man who stands before her is not a ghost, or a mirage, as Electra has already provided the frame of reference for his ontological status earlier in the play. When Orestes returns from the 'ashes' of his urn, it is as though he is the phoenix reborn, and thus by extension, Agamemnon reborn. If the reading at 1394 of *neakoneton* is correct, then there are ideas of 'a newly sharpened' weapon, newly bloodied, all of which suggest a bloody rebirth. Other details of the narrative and the myth of the Phoenix suggest further connections. The Egyptian phoenix was associated with the Sed festival, which sanctified a renewal of kingship, a neat parallel with Orestes' return to take his father's place.⁵⁴ Herodotus says that the first act of the Egyptian phoenix was to return to Heliopolis to bury his father, and mentions the creation of an egg containing the remaining ashes, an image which fits neatly with the imagery of the urn in Sophocles' play. Rather than simply replacing the urn, when he arrives Orestes instead gives it a new significance as the link between him and his father.⁵⁵

In mythological terms, if this pattern does lurk in the background to Sophocles' play then there are several possible consequences for the character of Orestes. One is that, just as the myth of the phoenix was associated in the Greek mind with a change of epoch, a new beginning, so the return of Orestes is figured as the dawn of a new age, rather than simply the next stage in a family cycle of vengeance. Furthermore, if Orestes is figured as the reincarnation of Agamemnon, then the killing of Clytaemestra is not so much the act of a son killing his mother, as it is the husband returning the treachery of his wife, and thus the problematic issue of matricide fades into the background. Indeed, it has been suggested that Clytaemestra posed a threat to the life of Orestes himself, so that his act of matricide is a 'kind of self-defence in retrospect'.⁵⁶

What, then, of Electra? Does she see the Phoenix at the end of the play, or does she still see the carpet that led Agamemnon to his death? I think it is clear that her protracted mourning has proved extremely damaging, but if we see Orestes' return as in some way an answer for her prayer to Agamemnon at the hearth, then she is able to stop grieving, not by finding

⁵⁴ Van de Broek (1972) 22–23.

⁵⁵ The urn/egg is also connected to rebirth in Greek myth with the idea of the cauldron, see Halm-Tisserant (1993).

⁵⁶ Kells (1971) *ad* 296.

a resolution, but by stepping outside the cycle.⁵⁷ She never gets past the stage of denial, of wishing that the loved one would return to life, because in one way that is exactly what happens. What we see in broad terms is that the two opposite forces collide in the story, the eternal promise of the immortal phoenix (be this a theological point of faith or an elevation of family glory) and the equally persistent force of grief that remains as part of the human experience even after individual losses have been mourned and forgotten. The image of balance is one introduced to the play by Electra herself, when she doubts that she can keep her grief in check (119–120). It is fashionable to suggest that Greek tragedy was normative for its original audience, but it is difficult to see how Electra's experience of grief could be accommodated in society. Electra is released from the point of denial, and never moves into acceptance. Her greatest suffering is not caused so much by the hatred of Clytaemestra and the longing for revenge, but the fact that she cannot let go of Agamemnon. Hoping for the return of lost loved ones is part of the process of grief outlined by Kübler-Ross, but for mortals this is not normally a possibility, and there is no *deus ex machina* in Sophocles' play. If Electra had been focused on gaining revenge and hoping for the return of Orestes, she might have been a more stable character, but instead she is tied to Agamemnon. Finkelberg's article on line 187 is relevant to this debate, as she argues that we should see Electra not as mourning her lost future and children but as mourning for her parent, viewing herself as an orphan. The Egyptian *benu*/phoenix lives without a parent, and its first act is to mourn its father (Hdt. 2.73), a pattern which may work for Orestes, but what of Electra? Is there an answer for the fifth-century audience here about how to manage conflicting demands of grief and revenge? If Electra's grief is resolved by the return of Orestes, the paradigm of the phoenix, then this is not immediately a pattern that can be accommodated within the social norms of fifth century Athens. Grieving family members could not be consoled by a magical restoration of their loved one. The force of mourning rituals is, however, a formulaic version of this process, whereby the continuity of the family is stressed, and some consideration is given to the idea that the loved one may have some continued existence which should be recognized with offerings. Electra's great mistake may be to scorn the apparently empty rituals of mourning because of what she believes are the bigger issues of justice. One message of the play may be that to neglect

⁵⁷ *Contra* Montgomery Griffiths (2011), who sees Electra as trapped by her experience even at the end of the play.

the comforting day-to-day practicalities is a false sophistry. In Euripides' version of the story, Electra initially scorns the idea of recognition through tokens, but she is proved to be wrong in her cynicism. The legalistic and practical approach to life is shown to be hollow. Similarly, in Sophocles' play we may see a similar emphasis on the importance of ritual. The Chorus warn Electra that she is not the only one to have lost a father and suffer grief (153 ff.). Even once Orestes is revealed to have returned, ready to take vengeance, Electra's grief continues to haunt her, with the idea that she sees the Paedagogus as her father (1361 ff.). For Sophocles, the damage to Electra's heart and mind may come less from a psychosexual conflict than from a neglect of basic ritual, the formulaic mourning which even the immortal phoenix observes.

7. *Looking Ahead*

Playing with these mythological ideas further suggests that the play may reach out to audiences in successive generations not as the same play each time, but as a new phoenix born from the ashes of previous scholarship and performances. This is a play which is the same and yet different, reborn as the same creature, yet not the same. The impulse to mourn indicates that in some ways the new phoenix is not the same creature renewed but rather a new creature which draws upon the same physical elements, but retains an idea of self-consciousness and separate identity—the mourning is not for a past life, but for a different individual. For us, it may be about seeing the younger version of oneself, recognizing some continuity of identity, but also feeling some distance. Although it cannot be proved that the idea of the phoenix is behind the story in Sophocles' play, it is clear that there are areas of Greek mythology which we as a modern audience cannot access, myths which did not find their way into a literary or artistic tradition, whether because of accident or deliberate concealment. The story of the house of Atreus is a good example of how hidden strands of myth may lie behind popular stories. Transformation is part of the cornerstone of these family narratives, and magical elements are prominent. We should not forget that after the *Oresteia* trilogy Aeschylus staged *Proteus* as a satyr play, a story centred around the magical transformations of the sea god who met Menelaus on his way home. Helen was born from an egg, and the imagery of chicks, eagles, and vipers which dominates the Aeschylean *Oresteia* suggests more than one possible line of transformation. Evidence from the Greek magical papyri, curse tablets, and ritual artefacts all suggest that complex, powerful

symbolism formed a substratum of Greek cultural and psychological experience. The phoenix makes an appearance as part of Orphic imagery, so may well have had a hidden secret life for Sophocles' audience.⁵⁸ Imagery of the sun, prayers to Apollo, and appeals to the hearth of the home are common in tragedy, but for the original audience it may be that a particular passage of Sophocles' play activated an awareness of the phoenix myth, giving access to a semantic field we today cannot appreciate. There may be more to this story than meets the eye, and as the myth of the phoenix resonates in so many world cultures, this may be another reason for the play's continued popularity; as much as we respond to the characters and the social structures of the narrative, we may also be responding to a story about mortality, both how we face our own death and how we reconcile the death of a loved one with our own continued existence through a series of ritual processes that draw upon our humanity as much as social formulae. For a modern audience, among whom death is increasingly distanced and sanitized, this provides a useful corrective to social attitudes. If we cure cancer, according to the imagery of a recent charity advert, we will prevent the grief of the indicative families portrayed.⁵⁹ Of course, we all know that regardless of whether we prevent this particular disease, and remove this source of suffering, we will still be faced with our own death and the loss of loved ones, be it in five years or fifty. If we cannot move with our grief, we may become stuck like Electra, and we need the necessary corrective of the Phoenix imagery, bursting back to life yet still possessing an awareness of the previous death and the importance of rituals of mourning.

⁵⁸ See Van de Broek (1972) 142 on the Orphic fragment in Plutarch.

⁵⁹ Cancer Research UK 'Being Here' campaign advert 2007, (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMwt28P_xSQ&feature=related).

OEDIPUS TYRANNUS

Josh Beer

Such is the iconic status of *Oedipus Tyrannus* (*OT*) as the most famous Greek tragedy that it has arguably been the most widely interpreted work of classical literature. Two thinkers especially have been responsible for its iconic status: Aristotle and Freud. In his influential *Poetics* Aristotle clearly regarded *OT* as representing the best type of tragic plot, citing it more frequently than any other tragedy.¹ Since Freud coined the term 'Oedipus Complex' to describe unconscious drives based on a creative (mis)reading of *OT*, the term has become commonplace. This idea, in turn, has produced a large psychoanalytic literature, much of it only loosely based on the Sophoclean play.² However, psychoanalytic readings have not dominated the field, for scholars have drawn on almost every type of critical theory from the ritualistic to the deconstructionist. There have also been innumerable debates about Oedipus' guilt or innocence and to what extent he has freewill or his actions are predetermined. In the light of all this one might be tempted to adopt the well-known aphorism of the comic playwright Terence: *quot homines tot sententiae*, 'there are as many opinions as there are people'.

It will be salutary to begin with Reinhardt's crucial observation that *OT* is structured around illusion and truth or appearance and reality.³ Following from this we can observe that at the heart of the plot there are several paradoxes. Oedipus is the hunter and the hunted, the detective and the criminal, the saviour of his people and their destroyer. As the solver of the riddle of the Sphinx, Oedipus' own identity is a riddle. Visually, the most important paradox is centred on blindness and sight. Having lived in the world with eyes under the illusion he is a great man, Oedipus blinds himself as the most polluted of human beings when he discovers the truth of the terrible deeds he has committed. However previous writers had treated the story of Oedipus, two things at least were common knowledge and could not be altered: Oedipus' incest with his mother and his parricide. These allowed

¹ *Poet.* 52a24–26; 52a33; 53a11; 53a20; 54b7–8; 55a18.

² On Freudian interpretations, see Segal (1995) 161–179.

³ Reinhardt (1979) 98–104.

Sophocles to exploit, and some would say over-exploit, what is commonly called dramatic or tragic irony. We can be sure however that Sophocles' plot was a radical restructuring of the story. It is likely that he was the first to shape the myth of Oedipus in such a way as to turn the story of his birth into a mystery, based on Oedipus' mistaken idea, *hamartia* (*Poet.* 53a10,a16), of who his parents were. The discovery, *anagnorisis*, of his true identity leads to the reversal, *peripeteia*, of his fortunes (*Poet.* 52a15–18). This dramatic technique is unlikely to have been central to Aeschylus' earlier tragedy (now lost) which was centred on a family curse.⁴

As a corrective lens to much of what has been written before, I should like to structure my analysis around two things of prime importance. The first is that Sophocles was quintessentially a man of the theatre—not only a playwright but also his own stage director. Whatever he wants to say about Oedipus, therefore, is incorporated in his theatrical vision. Although our knowledge of the physical configuration of the Theatre of Dionysus at Athens in the 5th century BC is fragmentary, there were three main places of entrance and exit into the acting area(s): two *eisodoi* at the sides leading into the orchestra, one of which the audience is to suppose led into town and the other out; and a stage-building, *skene*, at the back of the orchestra with a central door which in *OT* represented the royal house of Thebes.

The second point I wish to emphasize is that at the centre of *OT* is the mask of Oedipus as the great ruler, and its destruction. It is the mask primarily that physically presents the illusion of a stage character. The Greek word for mask, *prosopon*, means 'face', and the *dramatis personae* of a tragedy are in essence faces. More literally, *prosopon*, means 'towards the eye', but whether this means towards the eye of the observer or the observed is unclear.⁵ Be that as it may, I am not concerned here about how the mask may have affected acting techniques or its religious associations, but rather with how the mask affects the metaphysics of the drama as a piece of theatre. Greek tragedy was presentational not representational theatre and in this type of theatre what is central is how the masks are presented.⁶ Following Aristotle in this respect, I shall concentrate on the plot (*praxis* or *muthos*—he uses both terms) and avoid character analysis, preferring instead to use

⁴ See Reinhardt (1979) 94–95 on how the Aeschylean version probably differed. On what is known of the myth, see Markantonatos (2007) 43–70.

⁵ Wiles (2007) 1 with references.

⁶ On the difference between 'presentational' and 'representational' theatre, see Arnott (1981) 47–49.

the Greek term *ethos* which Aristotle uses and for which 'character' is at best an imprecise translation.⁷ As Jones writes: 'the plot-character dichotomy is radically false to Aristotle's understanding of Tragedy ... character, like colour, must be denied even the most primitive autonomy'.⁸ *Ethos* is better understood as referring to the salient characteristics of types and not to the character of individuals. For example, in his *Rhetoric* (2. 12–14) Aristotle discusses the differences in the *ethos* of young, adult, and old men as types. Although we do not know what Oedipus' mask looked like, we can be sure that masks presented generalized types so as to be easily identifiable in a large theatre. As Rehm says: 'Tragic masks and costumes ... gave an immediate sense of character type, gender, age, social status, and economic class, conveying the central tragic conflicts between old and young, men and women, gods and mortals'.⁹ In addition, Sophocles' protagonists have a particular *ethos*, what Knox has termed: 'Heroic Temper'. They are 'bold, impervious to argument, intransigent, angry'.¹⁰ Also, Sophocles was especially fascinated by one special type of mask, the blind mask, which may seem paradoxical, given that etymologically *prosopon* means 'towards the eye'. Although it is not tenable to analyse pre-Platonic Greece simply in terms of 'shame' as opposed to 'guilt' culture, nevertheless one's public face, one's status and honour in the community, assumed a major significance.¹¹ This is at the root of the Greek conception of *hubris*, which 'is essentially the serious assault on the honour of another, which is likely to cause shame, and lead to anger and attempts at revenge'.¹²

Since the physical mask can by itself only convey so much, it is the words and the stage action (*praxis*) of the *dramatis personae* that have to enlarge the audience's understanding of the meaning of the masks. Because of space limitations I focus in what follows on how the language bears upon the significance of the mask, although I am aware that 'No play is more about language than the *Oedipus Tyrannus*'.¹³ In this respect there have been many excellent studies. Some have concentrated on salient imagery, particularly

⁷ For plot and *ethos*, see especially *Poet.* 49a21–50b8. Although I disagree with him radically about the notion of character, see Seidensticker (2008) for a discussion with extensive bibliography. For an anti-character reading of *OT*, see Wilamowitz (1917) 69–88.

⁸ Jones (1962) 31 and generally 29–46. He also writes, p. 59: 'the actor mask is not a portrait, not a likeness; it *presents* (my italics), it does not re-present; it gives us King Oedipus'.

⁹ Rehm (1992) 41.

¹⁰ Knox (1964) 28.

¹¹ Generally on shame and guilt, see Cairns (1993) 14–47.

¹² Fisher (1992) 1.

¹³ Segal (1981b) 151.

as pertains to vision and sight; others have focused on the ambiguities of the meaning of the play's language, illustrating the slipperiness of language in conveying meaning.¹⁴ Even Oedipus' name itself has been subject to interpretation. Although his name literally means 'swell-foot', derived from the pins in his ankles from when he was exposed as a child, it could also mean 'know-foot', thus relating it to the riddle of the Sphinx (what walks on four, two and three feet?).¹⁵ By solving the riddle, Oedipus established his reputation as a great man. Because mask and language in conjunction are the two essential ingredients of dramatic illusion, I shall return to the notion of dramatic illusion towards the end of this chapter to consider whether Sophocles may even be questioning the idea of theatre itself as a place of illusion.

Although the plot of *OT* is structured around Oedipus' search for the murderer of Laius and discovery of his own identity, it also traces his own life story backwards and this ends where it had begun in the darkness of the royal house, with Oedipus blind as he was before his birth in the same house. Every step forward Oedipus tries to make becomes, as it were, a step back in time. This helps to give the plot a certain nightmarish quality.

The prologue evokes the smell of death. Thebes is in the grip of a plague. A group of old and young suppliants file in before any word is spoken and take their place before Oedipus' altars (16). They are carryings boughs of religious supplication (3, 19, 143). We find other tragedies that begin with suppliant scenes. But these suppliants are exceptional: they are led by the priest of Zeus, himself *the god* of suppliants, who kneels before a man. Surely this is something extraordinary?¹⁶ Zeus' priest, bowed down with age, is probably supported on a stick, since otherwise it would be difficult for him to give such a long speech before so large an audience.¹⁷ Oedipus appears at the *skene* door and addresses the suppliants as 'children', a recurrent term in the prologue (1, 6, 32, 58, 142, 147). It is conceivable, therefore, that the stage tableau presents the ages of the Sphinx's riddle. In accordance with

¹⁴ On imagery in general, see Knox (1957) 107–158; on language, Gould (1990); on vision and sight, Seale (1982) 215–260; on ambiguity, Vernant (1988) and Goldhill (1986) 211–221.

¹⁵ See Knox (1957) 183–184 on Oedipus' name and Beer (1990) 107–120 on the relevance of the Sphinx's riddle for the staging.

¹⁶ See Delcourt (1937) for a discussion of the unusual aspects of this suppliant scene. As she writes, p. 68: 'La scène dans *Oedipe-Roi* est tout à fait unique dans la tragédie. Nulle part on ne trouve semblable contamination entre une *prière religieuse* et un *conseil demandé à un roi*' (her italics).

¹⁷ For the old having sticks on the Greek stage, see Aesch. *Ag.* 75; Eur. *Andr.* 588, *Bacch.* 363, *HF* 254, *Ion.* 743, *Phoen.* 1719, *Tro.* 276; Ar. *Eccl.* 276–278, *Nub.* 541, *Vesp.* 33, 1296.

his public status as a famous man (8), Oedipus says that he has come to listen to the suppliants' pleas in person and not through messengers. The ambiguous reports of 'messengers' will form a leitmotif in the tragedy.

After describing the terrifying effects of the plague, the priest addresses Oedipus as the people's saviour, having formerly rescued them from the monstrous Sphinx, the foundation of his power at Thebes. They now need his help again. Although the priest stops short of calling Oedipus a god (31–34), that he mentions the gods in the same sentence as Oedipus suggests an implicit comparison.¹⁸ He stresses Oedipus' status as a great man (40). Compare this with Creon's status as a ruler at the beginning of *Antigone*. Although Creon is described both as a *strategos* (general) and king (*Ant.* 8, 155), a term not used of Oedipus until his true origins have been revealed (1202), Creon's status as ruler is undercut even before he appears by the actions of a *mere* young woman who has defied his royal edict. Thus in the two tragedies the masks of the men in power assume a very different aura.

If Creon in *Antigone* is largely reactive in his new position as king, Oedipus is proactive. He has anticipated the suppliants' demands by sending his brother-in-law Creon to Delphi to ask Apollo's help in curing the plague. Oedipus' anxiety at the slowness of Creon's return becomes the signal for his arrival. We should note the build-up to Creon's entrance. The priest heralds it by describing Creon as wearing a crown of fully laden laurel leaves, overtly a good omen (82–83). But what is its deeper meaning? As a man in full command of his physical capacities, the wreathed Creon, in presentational theatre, poses an unspoken visual threat to Oedipus' position.¹⁹ Unless we believe Sophocles is not interested in incidental details, this threat to Oedipus' position is given a political edge when Creon asks, in reply to Oedipus' question of what news he brings, whether he should speak it before all or inside.²⁰ There is often the suggestion in Creon's language and movements that he is not always forthright, something which his mask here betrays. In the following action he will serve as a political foil for the forthright Oedipus.

¹⁸ Ehrenberg (1954) 67: 'The suppliants approach him almost as a god'. See also Reinhardt (1979) 95 and Griffith (1996) 77–78.

¹⁹ A laurel crown was given to victors at the Pythian Games, Paus. 10.7.7. Like Creon in *OT* the messenger in *Trachiniae* (178) is also wreathed. This is the clue for the audience that he and not Lichas tells the truth in the following episode.

²⁰ As Gould (1990) 211 writes: 'Creon, the envoy, enters but before he speaks the god's words there is a political issue to be determined: whether to speak publicly, in earshot of the gathered Thebans, or in private council inside the palace. Creon implies a preference for privacy; Oedipus decides, unhesitatingly, for public discourse.'

From the beginning, then, Creon's mask has a political colouring. When he tells Oedipus that the plague is caused by the Thebans' failure to investigate the murder of Laius, their former leader, Oedipus, on learning that he was murdered by robbers on a journey to Delphi, suspects that the robber—Sophocles deliberately makes Oedipus confuse the number—must have been bribed from within Thebes itself to murder Laius and that such a plot might also be directed against himself. Creon says that the murder itself is surrounded in mystery, since there was only one survivor from Laius' escort and he could tell nothing clearly. Thebes at the time was plagued by the Sphinx, and they had failed to carry out a full investigation.

Oedipus announces, in accordance with Apollo's commands, that he will investigate the murder again and orders the suppliants to stand and leave. He has fulfilled, as the priest of Zeus says, his promise to help. As they exit along the city *eisodos* are they led by the wreathed Creon? While they make their exit they pass by another group entering. But visually the two are different. This new group are just old men who form the Chorus. Although the Chorus in their entrance song, *parodos* (150–200), will recall many of the images of the plague from the prologue, in their paean to the gods for help they will not kneel before the altars of a man but will offer their prayers in a more traditionally pious fashion. In these prayers the image of Zeus, whether as the father of Apollo or of Athena, takes pride of place: 'O sweet-spoken word of Zeus, what are you that have come from Pytho, rich in gold?' they begin (151–153).²¹ As the god of Delphi, Apollo the Healer is simply the spokesman of Zeus. Thus the Chorus' prayers to the gods stand in contrast with the pleas of the priest of Zeus to Oedipus earlier. What would the more traditionally religious minded in the audience have made of this difference?

After the *parodos* Oedipus immediately enters as if in answer to the Chorus' prayers. The ironies which were latent in the prologue now become more explicit. In issuing the proclamation against the murderer Oedipus unknowingly curses himself.²² In answer to the terrible force of Oedipus' announcement the Chorus suggest that Oedipus send for Tiresias, the blind prophet, who sees all that Apollo sees (285–289). The proactive Oedipus, tellingly on Creon's advice, has already sent for him. There is a small mirror scene here for, as in the prologue when Oedipus had already sent Creon to Apollo at Delphi and is curious about the delay of his return, Oedipus wonders why the prophet of Apollo is not already here. Both Creon and

²¹ All translations are my own. On Zeus' significance in *OT*, see Segal (1995) 180–198.

²² On Oedipus' edict, see Carawan (1999).

Tiresias are, at root, messengers from the god, but that is where any resemblance ends. Creon is simply a human messenger, potentially fallible like all human messengers. As a true spokesman of Apollo, Tiresias' mask conceals the invisible god, inscrutable to the human eye. As is typical of Apollo, Tiresias will speak in riddles.

At first, Oedipus is respectful, appealing to Tiresias as a champion and saviour (303–304). But Tiresias is reluctant to speak and only when accused by Oedipus of being complicit in Laius' murder does he explode into denouncing Oedipus as the murderer he seeks. Oedipus is totally uncomprehending. He, not Tiresias, had rescued the city from the riddling Sphinx by his own human intelligence unaided by help from any divine signs (390–398). This powerful scene presents a clash between two types of understanding, the human and the divine. Unable to grasp the import of Tiresias' words, since his mask is that of a political leader, Oedipus accuses Tiresias of being a front to cover a plot by Creon to overthrow him (378–403). Blind to the truth, he openly demeans Tiresias' status as a prophet. Only once does he seriously take note, when Tiresias says: 'Foolish as such I am to your thinking but to those who gave you birth I am all too wise.' 'What parents? Stop! Who did give me birth?' (435–437). Here is the first intimation of a slippage in the great ruler's mask. There is an unknown child behind the mask. Before he departs, Tiresias will spell out the enigma of Oedipus' life. Some have thought that Oedipus must depart before Tiresias utters his last statement, because his meaning seems too obvious not to be understood, but this is to fail to understand how masked, presentational theatre works.²³ Coming as it does from the eyeless mask of Tiresias we should not undervalue the ironic reference to Oedipus' mask:

I shall leave after saying why I came, undaunted by your face (*prosopon*) for you cannot destroy me. But I say this to you, this man whom you've long been seeking by uttering threats and proclamations about the murder of Laius—this man is here, an alien by report, but in fact he will be shown a native Theban. Nor will he rejoice in his lot, for blind instead of seeing, a beggar in place of wealth, he will journey to a foreign land, groping his way on a stick. He will be shown as father and brother of the children with whom he lives, the son and husband of the woman from whom he was born, and heir to the bed of the father whom he killed. So go inside and ponder that and, if you find I have lied, then say I have no skill in prophecy. (448–462)

²³ For a discussion of Oedipus' exit, see Edmunds (2000) 60–64 with references to other discussions.

A comparison with the Tiresias scene in *Antigone* is instructive. In that play Tiresias at first is simply an intermediary between mankind and the gods, interpreting troubling omens when he tried to make sacrifices. Only when Creon insinuates that the seer is only interested in money does Tiresias make his dire prophecies. In *OT*, despite Oedipus' slurs to the contrary (395–398), Tiresias' words conceal the actual voice of Apollo. In *Antigone* Creon puts up a brave front in the prophet's presence but, as soon as Tiresias leaves, his kingly mask, as it were, collapses and he rushes off to try to reverse his previous decisions. When he next enters Creon is visibly no longer a proud ruler but a broken father, since he is carrying the body of his son, thus presenting himself in a different guise. Oedipus' mask, as the ruler who saved his people by his own human wit, is made of sterner stuff.

In the following ode (463–511) the pious Chorus strike a note of unease as they wonder who is the murderer the son of Zeus has proclaimed. They imagine him hounded and fleeing from the Delphic oracle. But they are in a dilemma as a result of the quarrel implied by Tiresias between Oedipus and the royal house of Thebes. For them Zeus and Apollo are wise, but can one truly judge between the wisdom of human beings? They have proof of Oedipus' wisdom through his saving the city from the Sphinx. This ode, like the previous episode, allusively poses the question of divine and human understanding.

Sophocles loves scenes of contrast. If the Tiresias scene had pitted against each other the human mask and the mask of an invisible god, with Creon's second entrance we are drawn into the maelstrom of all too human passions. He has come to defend himself against Oedipus' false accusations. It is possible that Sophocles has made a theatrical innovation by introducing Creon into the story of Oedipus' incest and parricide, as the bare bones of the myth do not seem to demand his presence. In any event, what seems scarcely doubtful is that Sophocles has greatly enlarged Creon's role, and it is the confrontation between Creon and Oedipus that provides the main political dimension of the tragedy. Creon's mask, as we have seen, is political from his first appearance, wearing a crown of laurel leaves, and Oedipus is not slow to draw attention to it in their second confrontation: 'You, have you such a face (*prosopon*) of effrontery that you have come to my house, when you are palpably intent on being my murderer and the open robber of my power (*tyrannis*)?' (532–533). The tyranny motif had been introduced earlier, first neutrally of Laius' rule (128), then, in the Tiresias scene, of Oedipus (380, 412), but with Creon here Oedipus' status as *tyrannus* becomes a central issue (514, 541, 592). It is a distortion to translate these terms as simply

king and kingship, something to which we shall have to return. Almost as if he were at a legal hearing, Creon defends himself against Oedipus' accusations.²⁴ Why should he want to hold the tyranny when he can exercise power and authority without any of its pains (592–593)? Given his mask, Creon's words appear to Oedipus to have a specious ring.

When Oedipus threatens him with death, Creon is only saved by the entrance of Jocasta from the *skene*. In this type of presentational theatre this is a point of critical importance. I have suggested elsewhere that, when Aristotle attributed to Sophocles the introduction of *skenographia* (*Poet.* 49a18), he did not mean 'scene painting' in a physical sense but giving the stage setting an imaginative notion of place. We find this clearly in the prologue of plays like *Ajax*, *Antigone*, *Philoctetes*, etc.²⁵ In the prologue of *OT*, little attention is paid to the *skene* building, although clearly Oedipus makes his entrances and exits from it. With Jocasta's entrance from it, the whole momentum of the tragedy changes. Before this point Oedipus has suspected that a plot is being hatched against him from outsiders. Now the *skene* is about to start to open up its dark secrets. This is not simply the intrusion of a woman into what has been a male world of political/religious wrangling; she is the wife-mother who gave Oedipus birth and the door through which she enters hides the place in which he was born.²⁶ It is an astounding *coup de théâtre*. This is made more powerful by the ambiguity of Jocasta's position. Wife she may be but, like a mother, she immediately puts Oedipus and Creon in their place as if they were two squabbling children: 'You miserable wretches, why have you stirred up this stupid war of words? Are you not ashamed to air your personal grievances, when the land is so blighted? You, will you not go inside, and you, Creon, to your home? Both of you, don't make a mountain out of your nothing pains' (634–638). Reluctantly, under pressure from Jocasta and the Chorus, Oedipus lets Creon go. In Jocasta's presence Oedipus' mask of authority has been penetrated and progressively, from now on, will be slowly but surely splintered until it is totally shattered. It is extraordinary theatre.

²⁴ On the legal aspect, see Lewis (1989) 58–59.

²⁵ Beer (2004) 26–29. In *OC* the *skene*, the grove of the Eumenides, will become the dead Oedipus' final home. The only extant tragedy in which the *skene* as a home of one kind or another is rather vague is *Trachiniae*. This may well be because it is not a proper home, but simply the place in which Heracles lodges his female conquests; in other words, it is a borrowed home, providing Deianira with no security.

²⁶ See Kirkwood (1958) 253–254 on the ambiguity of Jocasta's position and how it is more overtly played on by some later dramatists.

With Jocasta's arrival the unravelling of Oedipus' identity begins. On learning the cause of the quarrel between Oedipus and Creon, Jocasta provides the first clue that Oedipus himself may be the murderer he seeks. Solicitous as any wife or mother, Jocasta tries to comfort Oedipus by telling him to ignore Tiresias' words and not to put any trust in prophecy, since an oracle from Delphi had once said that, if Laius fathered a child by her, that child would kill him, but the child had been exposed to die and Laius had been murdered by highwaymen at a place where three roads meet. Far from comforting him, Jocasta undermines Oedipus' mask of confident authority, and he asks that the only witness who had escaped from the scene of Laius' murder be sent for immediately. He describes his upbringing at Corinth as the son of Polybus and Merope and how, one day, a drunken man had accused him of being illegitimate. Failing to get a satisfactory answer from his 'parents', he had consulted the oracle at Delphi which, instead of answering his question, had direly predicted that he would marry his mother and murder his father. Thereupon Oedipus had left Delphi, resolving never to return to Corinth. On his journey, at the place where three roads meet, he had encountered a man in a wagon with an escort, such as Jocasta had described (804), who had violently tried to thrust him from the road. In retaliation, Oedipus had killed them all, or so he thought.

Oedipus' long account has many of the hallmarks of a messenger speech but, unlike a conventional one, Oedipus himself is the subject of his own message. Oedipus' only hope of not being the murderer is that the survivor had claimed that robbers had been the killers. If this is true, then he is not the murderer, since one can't be many. Again, Jocasta tries to assuage his fears: 'Be assured that this is how the word was made public; he cannot go back on his word, since the whole *polis*, not I alone, heard it' (848–850). Even if he does, Jocasta continues, he will never show that Laius died at the hands of her son as Apollo had prophesied. A small point, but an important one—at the end of this scene Oedipus and Jocasta exit together into the *skene*. Their fates are inescapably linked.

The following central ode is the linch-pin of the religious dimension of the tragedy (863–910), but its interpretation has caused much controversy.²⁷ Let us say at once that if it does not allude to Oedipus in some way then Sophocles is being obtuse. If several critics have doubted this, it is because

²⁷ For references to other discussions of the ode, see Fisher (1992) 329–342 to which add Podlecki (1993) and Edmunds (2002) 82–92.

they have approached the ode through character rather than the mask. The ode's metrical structure is A, A, B, B, but its narrative structure is A, B, B, A, with A dealing with religion and the Chorus' attitude to the gods and B with *hubris* and the hubristic man. This chiasmic structure has the effect of trying to contain the hubristic man within religion.²⁸

The pious Chorus begin strophe A by praying that their destiny may find them purely reverent in all respects as laid down by the heavenly and everlasting laws of Olympus. Antistrophe A, in stark contrast, begins, '*Hubris* breeds the tyrant', and proceeds to describe how *hubris* foolishly goes to the highest peak of recklessness, a thought which the Chorus counter with a prayer that god may not undo the struggle that brought good to the *polis*. In strophe B the Chorus elaborate on the *ethos* of an arrogant man who, without fear of *Dike*—here not simply Justice, but all that is religiously Right—or reverence, treads on what is inviolate. If such deeds are to be *honoured* (895), why should they dance in a chorus? This leads to a transition back to themselves in Antistrophe B. There is no point in their visiting any shrines of the gods, unless Zeus is mindful of these things, since the oracles concerning Laius are failing, and Apollo is nowhere clearly held in *honour*, for religion (*ta theia*) is dying (909–910).

That this Chorus of pious men should threaten to drop their masks as dancers in a tragedy is unprecedented and contains a vital clue to the meaning of the ode, since it is either their mask as believers or the exposure of the hubristic man that is at stake.²⁹ Scholars have objected that the words '*Hubris* breeds the tyrant' cannot refer to Oedipus, because 'tyrant' has a pejorative meaning here, but Oedipus is a good ruler and elsewhere the word is used in a neutral sense, simply suggestive of the metrically more difficult word for king. This is to read Oedipus' *ethos* falsely through character rather than his mask. In the prologue, with the priest of Zeus as a suppliant at his feet, Oedipus is presented almost as a man-god. Later, he publicly demeans Tiresias, behind whose blind mask is the voice of Apollo. Both of these things reveal Oedipus' mask as hubristic, since it threatens the public status of the gods. He has also publicly shamed Creon's status as an

²⁸ On the chiasmic structure, see Edmunds (2002) 90.

²⁹ As Dodds (1966) 46 says: 'They [i.e. the Chorus] step out of the play into the contemporary world.' The Chorus' anxiety here is perhaps foreshadowed earlier in a small *kommos* (646–667 and 678–696). In this strophic exchange, first with Oedipus, and then with Jocasta, the Chorus, unlike the two actors, employ the dochmiac metre (656–657, 661–662, 685–686, 690–692), expressing their growing fears. On the uniqueness of this *kommos*, see Scott (1996b) 35–39.

honourable citizen.³⁰ This does not mean that Oedipus' wrestling on behalf of the *polis*, possibly an indirect allusion to his encounter with the Sphinx (880), did not have beneficial aspects for which he was honoured.

After the ode Jocasta re-enters to pray at the altar of Apollo, since Oedipus is full of dire fears and no longer behaves like the rational helmsman of a ship. Oedipus is not the man she once married, the supremely confident master of the *polis*. In turning to Apollo, this woman who had earlier rejected the efficacy of prophecies now, in her distress, prays to the very god whose oracles she had formerly challenged. As a result of her unseen encounter with Oedipus in the house the foundations on which their marriage was based have been seriously challenged, and now she appears as a distraught wife-cum-mother willing to do anything to help Oedipus in his distress. Her mask, as it were, is slipping.

It has sometimes been suggested that the arrival of a Corinthian messenger at this moment is Apollo's ironic answer to her prayers.³¹ True or not, this is a surprise entrance. The audience has been led to expect the arrival of the Theban shepherd. Some regard surprise as antithetical to tragedy and more befitting melodrama but Sophocles often uses surprise to further the dramatic suspense.³² The Corinthian messenger provides some comic relief which, like the cross-dressing scene in Euripides' *Bacchae*, only increases the suspense for the horrors to come. The messenger asks for the house of the tyrant Oedipus. Later this mere hireling will drop the formality and address Oedipus simply as the child (1008, 1030) whom he rescued from death, thus beginning the revelation of the lost child hidden by the tyrant's mask. The Chorus, in reply to the messenger's inquiries, points to Jocasta and plays on the ambiguity of her position: 'Here is the wife, mother of his children' (928).³³ When Jocasta and Oedipus learn that Polybus has died of old age and the Corinthians will take Oedipus as their tyrant (940–941), they are elated at the apparent unfulfilment of Apollo's dire prophecies. However elation turns to despair when they learn that Polybus and Merope were no blood relations of Oedipus. He had been given to them as a baby by the messenger himself who had received him from the very Theban who had earlier been summoned. Jocasta, realizing the terrible truth of Oedipus' birth,

³⁰ On Oedipus' defamation of Tiresias and Creon, see Edmunds (2000) 48 on *OT* 427.

³¹ E.g. Kirkwood (1958) 93.

³² On surprise in Sophocles, see Beer (2004) 58, 72, 121–124, 128, 130, 141, 148, 151n13, 156, 158.

³³ At 928 we should retain the codices' reading: γυνή δὲ μήτηρ ἥδε τῶν κείνου τέκνων. See Buxton (1996) 48n17.

pleads with him to look no further. Her last words to him before she leaves to hang herself are the heart-wrenching cries of a distraught woman who has realized the horrifying shame of her incest: 'Ah, ah, you poor wretch, that is all I can call you, and never anything again' (1071–1072). Undeterred by Jocasta's pleas, Oedipus wrongly attributes her departure to her shame at his lowly birth. But even if the God of Chance is his mother, he will never be dishonoured, he claims. But he will be dishonoured and his birth will bring shame. Once he is blind, shame (*aischune* 1284) and its cognate (*aischros* 1408) will be words to describe himself: 'O marriage, marriage, source of my birth and afterwards raiser of the same seed, you revealed fathers as brothers, children of incestuous blood, and brides as wives and mothers, and (you revealed) whatever deeds are *most shameful* among mankind' (1403–1408).

In the brief third ode (1086–1109), sung while Oedipus is still onstage, the Chorus, pious as ever, in ironic contrast to what is unfolding, wonders whether in fact there may be something divine about Oedipus' birth. Is he the child of some nymph who lay with a god—Pan, Hermes, Apollo, or Dionysus? If his parents are divine, then all may still be well.

When the Theban shepherd finally arrives, he provides, under threat of torture, the final clue to the identity of the infant Oedipus. Instead of leaving the child to die he had saved it out of pity and given it to a neighbouring shepherd. What is significant about this scene is that, as the child behind the mask is revealed, Oedipus is visually surrounded by old men: the Chorus, the Corinthian messenger, and the Theban shepherd. Are they all carrying sticks? If so, it would not be untypical, and would foreshadow Oedipus' final appearance as a blind man with a stick.³⁴

The final ode (1186–1222) dwells on the vanity of human pretensions to greatness. No man wins more of happiness than an illusion. Oedipus, the conqueror of the riddling Sphinx, is their paradigm. Because of that he *is* called their king—the first time the word is used of him, ironically perhaps as having been shown to be the legitimate son of Laius—and *was* most greatly honoured (1202–1203). But now his is the saddest story to tell, for Time that sees all has found him out. Only the gods and their laws of Olympus, begotten on high, are eternal, we should remember. The ode is almost a plea for human humility.

A second messenger then enters from the *skene*, and recounts in graphic detail the hanging of Jocasta and the blinding of Oedipus with the pins from

³⁴ See footnote 16 above.

her broach.³⁵ But the opening address of the messenger to the Chorus is also noteworthy: 'O you who are forever most highly *honoured* in this land' (1223). The words come shortly after similar words the Chorus had used of Oedipus when he was tyrant before. Is it a recognition of the importance of the simple piety of these anonymous old men? Part of the function of the messenger's words is to prepare the audience for the dreadful look of the dishonoured Oedipus when he appears for the last time. The messenger describes the streams of blood that poured down from his eyes and forewarns the Chorus that they will see a sight that would stir pity even in one who hates. The change in Oedipus' status will be signalled both by his new blind mask and by the sung *kommos* between Oedipus and Chorus that follows.

The ending of *OT* has also caused considerable debate and even expressions of disappointment,³⁶ but it is a highly charged scene that contributes an important dimension to the tragedy. We need not dwell on the idea that Oedipus is to be regarded as a ritual scapegoat, a theory that has been fashionable in recent years.³⁷ Rather we should focus on the heart-wrenching pathos of the blind Oedipus and the scene's political/religious aspects. In the *kommos*, after the Chorus register their horror at Oedipus' appearance, there is an antiphonal lyric exchange, in which Oedipus thanks the Chorus for supporting him in his blindness. He acknowledges that Apollo was the cause of his sufferings, though his blindness was his own doing. He curses the shepherd who saved him to bring about his terrible deeds. Then in spoken iambics, before reviewing his life's journey that brought him to his present state, he justifies his self-blinding; he could not have looked upon his parents after death, nor could he bear to look upon his children, his city and its gods. He had proclaimed to everyone to drive him out as an impious man and one polluted in the eyes of the gods (1371–1384). This is the most profound expression of the shame of this blind mask, something that the seeing Oedipus earlier had scarcely envisaged. He simply wants to be cast out of Thebes, unseeing and unseen.³⁸

Creon's last entrance presents something of a mirror scene to the prologue. Like Oedipus earlier, Creon has sent a messenger to Delphi to ask what should be done in light of Oedipus' polluted presence in the city. Creon

³⁵ On the messenger's speech, see Barrett (2002) 190–222 for its unusual qualities.

³⁶ E.g. Scodel (1984) 72.

³⁷ For a criticism of the 'scapegoat' theory, see Griffith (1996) 29–44.

³⁸ See Cairns (1993) 216–219 on Oedipus' shame and its relationship to his blinding.

is now the ruler and Oedipus is the suppliant before him. From where does Creon make his entrance? I suggest that it must be from the palace. That Creon has not been in the royal house before should not bother us. In his first entrance he was wearing a crown. There had also clearly been an offstage communication between Oedipus and Creon out of the sight of the audience, as is evidenced when Oedipus had earlier informed the Chorus he had sent for Tiresias on Creon's advice (284–289). There has always been an aura of secrecy about Creon (91–92). Moreover it would be theatrically awkward for Creon to have Antigone and Ismene appear from the *skene*, when he has entered from an *eisodos*. Creon had provided much of the political dimension of the play. Even if he had expressed his unwillingness to be so earlier, it is an irony that he is now the new ruler. The irony is perhaps compounded if Antigone and Ismene are behind him as he enters for if, as is generally assumed, Sophocles' *Antigone* was produced some years before *OT*, Creon's own problem as ruler of Thebes is visibly present in the background. Creon, without rancour towards Oedipus and benevolent, like Oedipus in the prologue, accedes to his suppliant's request and allows him to hold his children, providing a final, powerfully moving speech from Oedipus.³⁹ Creon however will not grant Oedipus his final request to expel him from Thebes, without first consulting Apollo, even though the blind Oedipus is convinced that this is the god's intention (1436–1441). But the blind have no physical power. Creon is the master, the man on two legs, not propped up on a cane. Although his exile had often been alluded to in the tragedy (229, 455, 823–824, 1381–1382, 1410–1411), it seems Oedipus makes his final exit into the *skene*. Is this simply a further surprise? Or was Sophocles already contemplating a further tragedy in which the blind mask would dominate the stage and wanted to leave his options open as to where it should be set?⁴⁰ As the actors make their exit, the Chorus chant the final lines. These are often considered spurious, but they appropriately sum up Oedipus' fate. He solved the riddle of the Sphinx and was most envied by his city for his fortune. But disaster overwhelmed him. Count no one happy until he has passed beyond the boundary of life free from pain (1524–1530).

Because of the iconic status given to it by Aristotle, *OT* is often considered the archetypal tragedy, but this can lull us into doing it injustice as revolutionary theatre. No one apart from Aeschylus in *Agamemnon* had used the

³⁹ On the moving effect of Oedipus' separation from his daughters, see Buxton (1996) 45.

⁴⁰ On the problems of the ending, see Sommerstein (2011) with references to other discussions.

skene to such powerful effect. In *OT*, when Jocasta enters, it is as if the womb, in which all Oedipus' secrets lie hidden, is opening up. The mask provides the main source of physical illusion in Greek theatre. In having the Chorus question their masks as dancers, in laying bare the reality behind Oedipus' mask, in making the blind mask of Tiresias conceal the hidden face of god, Sophocles is challenging the whole idea of theatre (literally a 'seeing place') as a place of illusion. He anticipated Brecht's alienation effect by over 2000 years. While Oedipus has eyes, the audience through their foreknowledge of his incest and parricide can look down on Oedipus' pathetic attempts to avoid his fate with the all-seeing eyes of Apollo but, as they leave the theatre, the audience may be as blind to what life awaits them as Oedipus was.⁴¹ Is this one possible reason why Sophocles, untypically, failed to win the tragic prize that year? As T.S. Eliot once wrote in *Burnt Norton*: 'Human beings cannot bear very much reality'. Plato certainly felt the power of *OT* and tried to provide an answer by structuring his *Apology of Socrates* around it and making Socrates realize that the first rule of knowledge and virtue is a recognition of one's own ignorance.⁴²

Freud was as revolutionary a thinker in his own day as Sophocles was a playwright in his. He was sensitive to the power of great literature. However, he misread *OT* by seizing upon Jocasta's words: 'Many a man has slept with his own mother in his dreams' (981–982) and making this the foundation of his 'Oedipus Complex'. Nevertheless, in sensing that in *OT* there were latent desires hidden beneath the surface of human identity, he was himself perhaps responding unconsciously to the power of the mask in Sophocles' tragedy. The result however of his misreading has not been beneficial for an understanding of *OT*. It places far too much emphasis on the inner self. This may work for representational theatre but is deleterious for understanding the presentational drama of the Greeks. Mask theatre has its own subtleties.

Oedipus solved the riddle of the Sphinx by giving the answer 'Man'. The tragedy presents Oedipus as an exceptional man only to reveal all his pretensions to power and knowledge to be based ultimately on ignorance. He does not even know his own identity. Although we cannot date the tragedy precisely, it clearly falls during the era that is popularly known as the Greek Enlightenment, and Athens was at its centre. Many of the great writers and thinkers, those who were not actually Athenian, frequented the

⁴¹ It almost seems as if Sophocles is challenging the audience to a metatheatrical debate on the whole concept of illusion.

⁴² See Fagan (2009) on Oedipus and Socrates.

city. One thinks of Protagoras, Anaxagoras, Herodotus, and Gorgias among others. Athens was an open community where all citizens could engage in the public life of the community. Yet how many of them would not have been disturbed by the new free thinkers who were challenging traditional religious views? *Ta theia*, 'things to do with the gods', were not matters that could be set apart, for they were integral to every aspect of the *polis*: monuments to the gods were visible on every street, and the Athenian calendar was crammed with religious festivals and cults. Protagoras claimed that 'Man is the measure of all things' (DK 80.1) and was openly sceptical about the existence of the gods (DK 80.4). Gorgias proclaimed that nothing exists and that, even if it did, it could not be proved (DK 82.3). Whether he was serious or not, he loved displaying his rhetorical, not to say sophistic, skills in public. When he addressed the Athenian assembly as part of a delegation from Leontini in 427 BC, the strange power of his rhetoric excited wonder (Diod. Sic. XI 53, 1–5). Yet this was the same assembly which had heard Pericles a few years before. Would not all this scepticism have been considered *hubris* by many, an assault on the public standing of the gods? Aristophanes' comedy, *Clouds*, produced originally in 423 BC, was clearly intended to provide a popular response to this new learning, even if it fell flat.⁴³ One can imagine a typical response: 'I don't want to hear about all that intellectual twaddle of Socrates and his newfangled ideas about the gods'.

Sophocles was clearly *au fait* with this intellectual revolution. We don't have to see him as a pious conservative if he brought a healthy scepticism to this new learning. I once suggested with regard to *Antigone* that 'the tragedy dramatizes a *polis* in crisis about what constitutes correct religious values'.⁴⁴ I would say much the same thing about *OT*, but in *OT* the crisis is more profound, since what is at stake is the whole edifice of religion. In the famous 'Ode to Man' in *Antigone* the Chorus sing, 'Having a subtle inventive skill beyond all expectation he (i.e. man) treads now towards disaster, now towards good' (365–367). But man can never know which since, as Sophocles says in a famous fragment (919): 'You could not fathom the ways of the gods (*ta theia*), if the gods conceal them, not even if you went out and examined everything'. For Oedipus the Sphinx and her riddle were a divine trap which set him up as the great saviour of the people. But

⁴³ On the presentation of Socrates in *Clouds*, see Parker (1996) 203–206. Note that Aristophanes is giving *presentation* of Socrates, not a representation. Presentation is arguably the root idea behind the concept of mimesis.

⁴⁴ Beer (2004) 77.

his greatness was but a mask. Man is not the measure of all things, and it is *hubris*, an assault on the public standing of the gods, to think that he is, since human knowledge may be simply a mask for his ignorance in the face of the unknown and what the future may have in store. Only Time, the Immortal Spokesman of the Gods, will tell.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ On time and knowledge in *OT*, see Segal (1995) 138–160.

ANTIGONE

David Carter

1. *Two Heroes*

Stubbornness is the defining quality in the Sophoclean hero. So argued Knox (1964) with reference to six figures—Antigone, Ajax, Electra, Oedipus (twice), and Philoctetes—after whom each play is named. In most but not all cases we can tell that the hero is stubborn by the presence of an adviser figure, who tries—unsuccessfully—to persuade the hero to change his or her mind: Ajax has Tecmessa; Electra has Chrysothemis; Oedipus (in the first play) has first Teiresias and then Jocasta.¹

Antigone is intriguing, for here we have not one but two unyielding heroes. Antigone is stubbornly determined to bury her brother Polyneices against political opposition. Polyneices died trying to claim the rule of Thebes from his brother Eteocles. In order to do so he raised an army in Argos and attacked his own city. Both brothers died in the battle. Sister Ismene advises Antigone against this course of action since as women they are powerless (61–64), advice that Antigone bitterly rejects. Creon, brother-in-law of the dead Oedipus and regent following the collapse of the royal house, is stubbornly opposed to burial for the traitor Polyneices. His son Haemon and the prophet Teiresias advise him to leave Antigone alone, but he is determined to punish her by sealing her in a cave so that she will starve to death. However, once Teiresias has left the stage Creon does a curious thing (1091–1106):

¹ On adviser figures, see Easterling (1977) 124; Lardinois (2003), who distinguishes this kind of adviser as a 'tragic warner'. These figures can be understood in terms of dramatic function as much as character: see Carter (2005) 164–165 with further bibliography. Sommerstein (this volume, p. 209) warns that there is no trace of the Knoxian hero in fragmentary Sophoclean tragedy.

I cannot hope in this chapter to have done justice to the full range of theoretical approaches that *Antigone* has attracted. My rather more modest aim is to discuss the form of the play and then to place it in some of its social and political context. I am grateful to the editor and to Barbara Goff for helpful advice.

CHORUS: The man is gone, king, after uttering a fearful prophecy; and I know that since this hair, once black, now white, has clothed my head, he has never spoken a falsehood to the city.

CREON: I know it myself, and my mind is disturbed! For to yield would be terrible, but if I resist, my will may run into the fowler's net of disaster.

CHORUS: You have need of good counsel, son of Menoeceus!

CREON: What must I do? Tell me, and I will obey!

CHORUS: Go and release the girl from the subterranean dwelling, and make a tomb for him who lies there!

CREON: Is that what you approve, and do you think I should give way?

CHORUS: As soon as possible, king! Swift avengers from the gods cut off those who think mistakenly.

CREON: Alack! It comes hard, but I renounce my heart's purpose, and shall act! One cannot fight against superior force.

And so he changes his mind. This Chorus is composed of Theban elders selected by Creon for their record of loyalty to previous kings (164–169). Some of their loyal remarks may have been a little circumspect (for example 210–214); and Antigone herself has said they keep their mouths shut through fear of Creon (509); but in Antigone's final scene, having tried to offer her some words of comfort, they have made it clear that they take the side of authority (872–875).² Throughout the play they have almost always failed to advise Creon one way or another. It is therefore striking that they offer advice now, still more striking that Creon agrees to follow their advice before he has even heard it.

'There is no other scene quite like this in all Sophoclean drama,' says Knox,³ and he is probably right, although further thought is needed on Creon's character. Knox's assessment is that 'in this play two characters assume the heroic attitude, but one of them is in the end exposed as unheroic.'⁴ For Knox, the most interesting thing about Creon is that he shows us how *not* to be a Sophoclean hero. The decision to 'yield' to advice, terrible as it is for Creon, would never have been taken by the genuine article. In the strictest terms Knox must be correct: if a hero's defining quality is stubbornness then a yielding hero is no longer a hero. However, the situation demands closer analysis in two respects.

First, we note with Knox that this is not Creon's first change of mind in the play. Earlier, he condemns both Antigone and Ismene (who claims to

² These last remarks may be conditioned by the presence of Creon onstage throughout the scene: see Griffith (1999) 255. Or he may have left the stage at line 780, to re-enter at 883.

³ Knox (1964) 75.

⁴ Knox (1964) 62.

have helped her sister) to death by stoning. As in the lines quoted above, the faintest of prompts from the elders ('Then you have a mind to kill both of them?', 770) persuades Creon to drop charges against Ismene. He also changes Antigone's penalty so that she will be imprisoned in a cave with only a little food: his purpose is to distance the city from immediate responsibility for her death (773–776).⁵ For Knox, 'this change of plan is the first indication that Creon is not, after all, cast in the heroic mold',⁶ but this may be an overstatement. The Homeric prototype to the Sophoclean hero, Achilles in the *Iliad*, is unyielding in his decision to withdraw from the fighting, returning only when his actions have reached their tragic conclusion in the death of Patroclus. But in *Iliad* 9 he gradually compromises on a point of detail: whether to go home in the morning.⁷ Creon's earlier changes of mind are trivial ones of this type (compare Oedipus, who releases Creon at *Oedipus Tyrannus* 669–672).⁸ All this goes to show that the U-turn to come will be a complete surprise.

Second, Creon's change of mind makes him a more tragic figure, on one definition, than Antigone.⁹ An admittedly schematic but certainly authentic model for tragic heroism comes from Aristotle and runs something like this: an admirable man (or woman), not perfect, but a character such as we might aspire to, makes a dreadful mistake, realizes this mistake too late, and suffers the consequences (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1453a7–16). Aristotelian *anagnôrisis* ('recognition') thus coincides with *peripeteia* ('change of fortune'). In Aristotle's view the paradigmatic tragic hero is Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. He relentlessly pursues the inquiry into Laius' death against the advice of the prophet Teiresias, his wife Jocasta, and the Theban shepherd. He realizes not only this mistake but also his terrible past, but does so too late to prevent the suicide of Jocasta, and in this miserable state of recognition he blinds himself.

Antigone does not fit this Aristotelian template. There can be no moment of recognition because her actions are entirely deliberate: at no point is

⁵ Seaford (1990) explains this decision in terms of 'the retention of a girl by her natal family at the expense of her sexual union with an outsider or marriage'. This allows him to explore the idea of Antigone as the 'bride of Hades' (on which, see below) but he neglects the point that imprisonment is Creon's decision.

⁶ Knox (1964) 73.

⁷ Hom. *Il.* 9.427–429, 617–619, 650–655; Griffin (1995) 22.

⁸ Gibert (1995) 104–110. Knox himself gives ground on this at Knox (1966) 215n7.

⁹ On the following, cf. Torrance (1965) 298–299; Winnington-Ingram (1980) 117–118; Griffiths (1999) 27. Knox (1964) 67–68 concedes that Creon is closer to this Aristotelian template, but insists that 'he lacks the heroic temper'.

she unaware of their causes or consequences. Not only is she prepared to die but (as we shall see) she welcomes her fate. Creon is in fact closer to Oedipus inasmuch as he cannot foresee the terrible consequences of his actions for his own immediate family. He makes a mistake against the advice of Haemon and Teiresias. His recognition of this mistake ('I know it myself', in lines quoted above) may lead to a change of mind, but this comes too late to prevent the suicides of both his wife (Eurydice, whose speechless exit and reported death find similarities with Jocasta) and his son.

It has been suggested that Creon's change of mind might have reached a happier conclusion had he followed the Chorus' advice perfectly: this (see above) was to rescue Antigone and then bury Polyneices; by following these instructions in reverse, Creon reaches the cave too late.¹⁰ As a messenger reports (1206 ff.), he finds Haemon (who is love with Antigone) already there, clinging to Antigone's dead body. Wordlessly Haemon draws his sword on his father and swings it inconsequentially before turning it on himself. While Antigone reaches her tragedy with ruthless determination, Creon blunders towards his.

So there are two heroes here, and two tragedies, and this is reflected in the play's dramatic form: both Antigone and Creon engage with the Chorus in *kommoi* ('laments'), passages of heightened emotion in which the distraught hero does not speak but sing. The result of this double tragedy is one of the bloodiest of the seven extant plays: Polyneices and Eteocles die just before the action starts; Antigone, Haemon, and Eurydice during the action. Of the named characters, only Ismene, Creon, and Teiresias are left alive by the end. (The only other extant Sophoclean tragedy to score a 50% death-rate among named, speaking characters is *Trachiniae*: Deianeira and the herald Lichas die during the action; Heracles also is in mortal agony at the end.)

The presence of two heroes leads to the old and possibly boring question of who the play is really about. On the basis of stage-time there should only be one winner. The Greek text of *Antigone* is 1,353 lines long. Of these, 216 lines are spoken by Antigone, and 350 by Creon. However, these raw figures mask the way in which Antigone dominates her scenes. She leaves the stage for good at line 943, just over two-thirds of the way through the drama. So her allotted lines are roughly in proportion to Creon's, given the available time to be filled. Her part is distributed across only three scenes: the prologue; an early confrontation with Creon; and her *kommos* followed by a final exchange with Creon. We see Antigone and Ismene in the

¹⁰ Kitto (1956) 174–175.

prologue, and these are the only females in the play (apart from Eurydice, who features very briefly later on). A Greek tragic prologue by definition ends with the entry of the Chorus, in this case a Chorus of Theban elders, and from this point on it is very much a male drama: Antigone has politicized herself by her actions, and it is the political world of Creon and his associates into which she ventures. The central scenes of the play revolve around the two *kommoi* and three great confrontations: with Antigone, Haemon, and Teiresias.¹¹ Creon is the interlocutor in each of these confrontations. Further, while Antigone exits at the end of each of her scenes, Creon remains at the end of some of his,¹² and is onstage as the play ends. Creon, therefore, is almost constantly present; Antigone's part in the play is briefer and more concentrated—although she still features after she has left the stage, not least in the messenger's speech about the discovery of her body.¹³

So the play begins with Antigone and ends with Creon: their two tragedies overlap. *Antigone* is in fact only the least obvious example of the so-called 'diptych' plays of Sophocles, presenting a double situation.¹⁴ The purest example is *Ajax*, in which the hero kills himself three-fifths of the way through the drama. At this point the Chorus has divided up and left the stage. When they re-enter it is as if the play begins all over again. There is a new, less grand hero, Ajax's bastard half-brother Teucer; and a new crisis, whether or not to give Ajax a burial. The next best example of a diptych play is *Trachiniae*: only 'next best' since the two parts are of unequal length. 'Part Two' consists only of the long *exodos* (final scene), in which Heracles appears for the first time (although his return has been anticipated from the beginning, and reported from not far away). His wife Deianeira, the principal figure until now, has already died by her own hand. The fresh crisis again concerns the death rites of the hero. *Antigone* does not contain such a neat division of parts; rather, as I have said, the panels overlap.¹⁵ The term 'diptych' was once used by scholars to criticize these plays, *Ajax*

¹¹ Griffith (1999) 16–17.

¹² Winnington-Ingram (1980) 118; Griffith (1999) 24; and see footnote 2 above.

¹³ In the play's original staging the protagonist (principal actor) would have taken the part of Creon and probably no other. One expects that the deuteragonist played Antigone, Haemon, and Teiresias, and probably Eurydice. That would leave the tritagonist playing Ismene, the guard, and the messenger(s). Cf. Pickard-Cambridge (1988³) 141; Griffith (1999) 23. Aeschines is described by Demosthenes in a speech (*On the False Embassy* 247) as playing Creon as tritagonist; Pickard-Cambridge suggests that Demosthenes is bending the truth. Brown (1987) assumes the protagonist took the part of Antigone.

¹⁴ The term was probably first used by Webster (1936) 103; for its history in Sophoclean scholarship, see Garvie (1998) 9.

¹⁵ Waldo (1951) 122; Kirkwood (1958) 43.

especially, which was seen as an immature work.¹⁶ Others, whose view now finds general acceptance, prefer to demonstrate thematic unity or dramatic effectiveness.¹⁷ In *Antigone*, likewise, we should not be overly troubled by the double nature of the tragedy.

2. *Two Agendas*

These two heroes, with two very different priorities, have inspired various readings of the play, including (influentially) that of G.W.F. Hegel. For Hegel, a good tragedy arises from the collision of different interests. His supreme example is *Antigone*: here we have a collision of two points of view, each of them correct in itself and yet incompatible with the other; whether you side with Antigone or Creon depends essentially on whether your priorities are with the family or the city, but each view has something to be said for it.¹⁸

Or does it? Creon's position seems flawed, and increasingly so as the drama progresses. Those three great confrontations bring successive challenges to his orders. Antigone's can be called a legal challenge: his own proclamation cannot override the more fundamental 'unwritten' laws of the gods (450 ff.).¹⁹ Haemon's is a political challenge: he does not have popular support (629 ff., 733). And Teiresias' is a religious challenge: carrion birds are polluting the altars of Thebes with parts of the dead Polyneices (1017–1022). In his change of mind Creon himself finds agreement with Antigone.

Can anything be said for Creon's policy? Two pieces of ancient evidence are worth considering. The first is a reference to an Athenian law that forbade the burial of traitors or temple robbers on Attic soil.²⁰ This gives us some idea of where popular moral priorities lay, although Creon's behaviour still emerges as extreme and unreasonable. He not only forbids the burial of the body on Theban soil, but decrees that it should stay there *unburied*.²¹ One wonders why he cannot simply allow the body to be buried abroad; however, this is perhaps to trivialize the importance and difficulty of recovering one's dead in Greek literary accounts of war. In the *Iliad* the recovery

¹⁶ Waldock (1951) 49–67, inspired by the scholion to Soph. *Aj.* 1123.

¹⁷ Themes in *Trachiniae*: Easterling (1982) 2–6, following Segal (1977). Dramatic unity in *Ajax*: Kitto (1961³) 118–123; Garvie (1998) 9–11.

¹⁸ Paolucci (1962) 325.

¹⁹ Harris (2004).

²⁰ Xen. *Hell.* 1.7.22; cf. Thuc. 1.138.6.

²¹ This is certainly not how we should understand the Athenian law: see Patterson (2006b)

by the Greeks of the dead Patroclus occupies the whole of Book 17, and the poem only ends once a crisis over the body of Hector is resolved, Achilles returning it to the Trojans for burial.²²

The evidence of this law gives us some context for Creon's actions, assuming that Athenians in the original audience judged him as they did their own political leaders. However, the original audience—like any audience—will have held a broad variety of views. If anything, it was more natural to consider Creon as a Theban from the heroic age. These Thebans, we are reminded by Bennett and Tyrrell (1990), (1998), were best known at Athens for their refusal to surrender for burial the bodies of the seven heroes who died in the attack on Thebes (among them Polyneices). In Athenian folklore the role of Athens is to recover the bodies and secure their burial. This is encapsulated most obviously in so-called funeral orations (public speeches in honour of the war dead), and also in a number of tragedies, including Euripides' *Suppliants* and Aeschylus' lost *Eleusinians*. It is a stretch to consider the Sophoclean *Antigone* as an allegory for Athens, as Bennett and Tyrrell do: *Antigone* lacks the panhellenic perspective of (say) *Suppliants* (unusually for a Greek tragedy, all its characters are native to the city where the play is set); and in giving the role of burier to a Theban woman and disregarding the fates of the other six heroes, Sophocles makes no allusion to the role of Athens in the story. That said, Athenians in the audience of first performance ought to have been in no doubt who was right and who was wrong.

The second piece of evidence is more promising since it does not require us to guess the audience members' opinions on a particular law. Rather, it points more generally to Greek political values.²³ It comes from a speech attributed to the Athenian statesman Pericles (Thuc. 2.60):

My own opinion is that when the state is on the right course it is a better thing for each separate individual than when private interests are satisfied but the state as a whole is going downhill. However well off a man may be in his private life, he will still be involved in the general ruin if his country is destroyed; whereas, so long as the state itself is secure, individuals have a much greater chance of recovering from their private misfortunes.

(transl. R. Warner)

²² Thus Shapiro (2006) finds a Homeric precedent for Creon's extreme treatment of the corpse.

²³ We should remember that the original audience included a large minority of foreigners. For this reason the politics of a Greek tragedy may not always have been narrowly Athenian: see Carter (2004); cf. Rhodes (2003).

These words, if they were delivered in this form, were spoken to the Athenian assembly in 430 BC, almost certainly after the first performance of *Antigone*,²⁴ and in different circumstances from Creon's. However, a comparison with part of Creon's opening speech is inescapable (184–190):

I would never be silent, may Zeus who sees all things for ever know it, when I saw ruin coming upon the citizens instead of safety, nor would I make a friend of the enemy of my country, knowing that this is the ship that preserves us, and that this is the ship on which we sail and only while she prospers can we make our friends.

Neither Pericles nor Creon objects to the pursuit of private interests, it is just that they insist on the priority of the city, which in their view enables private life to flourish. Compare the introduction to Aristotle's *Politics* (1253a19 ff.), in which the members of a city are described like the feet or hands of the body politic: the whole can survive without the parts, but not the other way round. So the priority of the city made sense in an ancient Greek context. By contrast, it seems objectionable to modern, liberal thinking, which tends to prioritize the individual and keep the state out of things unless strictly necessary. (We should note in addition that one is less likely to celebrate the protecting arm of the state during peacetime: the context of both the passages quoted above is war or the aftermath of war.) The liberal idea of the state has certainly informed several modern productions of *Antigone*, in which the title figure comes across as far more heroic than the dull dictator Creon;²⁵ but this is a potential stumbling block in the interpretation of the play.

The rationale behind Creon's proclamation was therefore respectable enough on Greek terms (his opening speech appears to have been quoted with approval by Demosthenes, *On the False Embassy* 247), and his stubbornness very nearly matches that of Antigone: so much for Hegelian

²⁴ Likely to have been in the late 440s BC. Sophocles' ancient biographer was elected one of Athens' ten generals following the success of *Antigone*. Modern commentators tend to reject a causal link between the play and the generalship, but many accept that the one may have come soon after the other, tempting our ancient source to make this link the more easily: see Kamerbeek (1978) 36; Brown (1987) 1–2; Griffith (1999) 2; Tyrrell (this volume). We know Sophocles served as general in the year 441/0 BC, but that Euripides won first prize at the Dionysia of 441 BC. Logically this gives us a first performance of *Antigone* the year before: 442 BC. Criticism of this view has come from Lewis (1988), who suggests 438 BC; Scullion (2002) 85–86, who prefers a date in the late 450s BC. Nobody of whom I am aware thinks of *Antigone* as one of Sophocles' late plays, mainly because of a lack of *antilabé* (splitting lines between speakers), a technique which appears more frequently in later Sophoclean drama.

²⁵ Carter (2007) 146–155.

balance. But the equilibrium is upset in two respects. First, as we have seen, the implementation of Creon's 'city-first' policy is unsound. As Lauriola (2007) has recently demonstrated, Creon is frequently described in language that suggests he has poor sense while Antigone is associated with good sense; for this reason, and given the respective rights and wrongs of their actions, Antigone's inflexibility comes across as a virtue, Creon's as a flaw. That said, Antigone's good sense never takes the desirable form of *sôphrosynê* ('prudence', 'moderation').²⁶ In fact, as we shall see in the final section of this chapter, her inflexibility leads her to act inconsistently with respect to her own motivating rationale, honour for *philoî* ('close friends and relations').

Second, we should not infer from all this that there was an incompatibility between public and private interests in ancient Greece, or even in this play. Creon could and should have found a more reasonable solution to the crisis. The reason that he does not can be explained in terms of character: Knoxian intransigence again. If anything this is a particularly contrived piece of drama,²⁷ but it works because it is played out logically from the starting positions of its two principal figures.

This play of two points of view, with two heroes to champion them, has provided a handy base for structuralist critics, who ground their readings in the identification of pairs of opposites.²⁸ Structuralism is not as fashionable a school of thought as it once was, but it remains attractive to students of Greek literature, for the Greeks really do seem, to an extent, to have ordered their world in a bipolar way.²⁹ One authentic way of thinking about the Greek citizen is as mortal not god, man not woman, Greek not barbarian, free not enslaved.³⁰ Some (not all) structuralist readings of *Antigone* can appear suspiciously neat and tidy: a caricature pits Antigone (the woman, the champion of the family) against Creon (the man, the champion of the city). This is misleading. Creon's public policy turns out to be detrimental to

²⁶ Lauriola (2007) 396–397 with n37.

²⁷ The general absence of this story in earlier Greek literature has led some to believe that it was devised by Sophocles himself: see e.g. Baldry (1956) 34; cf. Müller (1967) 21. (The ending of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, in which Creon forbids the burial of Polyneices and Antigone resolves to defy him, is thought to have been added by a later author in response to Sophocles' play.) On Sophoclean invention in this play, see more recently Griffith (1999) 8 ff.

²⁸ For example Segal (1981a) 152–206; Oudemans/Lardinois (1987), which might be described as 'post-structuralist'.

²⁹ Lloyd (1966).

³⁰ Cartledge (2002²) with further bibliography.

the city, and the citizens themselves do not support him. As for Antigone, as I observe above, her actions bring her into public life. The woman who would prefer to remain indoors and uninvolved is Ismene, Antigone's foil in this respect.³¹ And, while Antigone's loyalties are with her family, most of this family is dead, as Antigone herself is at pains to point out. We shall see in the next section that she rejects the support she eventually gets from her only living blood relative, Ismene; and she makes no mention at all of Haemon, supposedly her future husband. The household to which the two daughters of Oedipus now legally belong is in fact Creon's; and it is the destruction of Creon's household that features strongly in the play, not that of Laius/Oedipus, which is complete before the play begins.

There are two helpful pairs of opposites, however, that I wish to explore here. The first, inside-outside, will help us to understand the politics of *Antigone*. The second, death-life, will lead me to a few remarks on religious aspects of the play.

3. *Inside and Outside*

Athenian public life took place predominantly in the open air: political meetings (except for those in the *Bouleuterion*, or council house) as well as what went on in the theatre and *agora* ('market place'). Sacrifices were conducted in the open air in front of temples and shrines, not under the roof. The citizen of a Greek city-state may have made a distinction between his life in public—interactions outdoors with other citizens in the assembly and law courts, in the *agora* or on the field of battle—and his private life, indoors with his family. Greek drama was played out in front of a stage building that represented some building, temple, tent or even cave—but most usually a royal house, as in *Antigone*. The audience never peered into this house (although a device called an *ekkyklêma* sometimes brought dead bodies from the inside out), but they could occasionally eavesdrop on the sort of scenes that ought to have taken place inside. One such scene is the prologue of *Antigone*, a whispered conversation between two female members of the same family. Antigone tells Ismene that she has

³¹ For this reason Antigone has been described as a 'bad woman' on ancient Greek terms, Ismene the more respectable model: see Sourvinou-Inwood (1989) and (1990), criticized in Foley (1995).

brought them outside so they will not be overheard (18–19); but what we are witnessing (in contrast to the public affairs later in the play) is essentially a domestic conversation.

In many tragedies it helps to consider the structural opposition of inside-outside in two respects: the first is the space inside the house and the space outside it; the second is the space inside the city and the space outside it. I have previously used the shorthand ‘at home, round here, out there’ to describe the three categories of dramatic space yielded by these two pairs of opposites.³² The middle category, which corresponds to the public spaces of the city in which a tragedy is set, is the one the audience can partially see, although it extends beyond the stage and into reported space. Therefore events reported in a tragedy, as opposed to seen onstage, might take place inside the house (‘at home’) or outside the walls of the city (‘out there’); or they might take place in off-stage parts of the public spaces of the city (‘round here’: consider in *Antigone* where Haemon and Teiresias have both just come from). What I hope to have shown elsewhere is that violent acts in tragedy take place either ‘at home’ or ‘out there’, but almost never ‘round here’. Thus the public spaces of the city are kept free from extremes of violence. This reflects an important, perhaps *the* important, political value in Greek tragedy: to keep the city safe.

Antigone provides a good demonstration of this model. The violent deaths in battle of Polyneices and Eteocles, killed at each other’s hands, took place ‘out there’, beyond the walls of the city. Polyneices’ body in this play remains ‘out there’ as a continuing source of unease. The three deaths that take place during the course of the play are where they ought to be: Antigone and Haemon ‘out there’ at the cave; Eurydice ‘at home’ within the house. This is not to say that the public spaces of Thebes remain free of trouble: the carrion deposited on Teiresias’ altars brings the troublesome presence of Polyneices’ body to threaten public space ‘round here’; and Creon brings Haemon’s body back onstage at the end of the play. (As in many or most tragedies, the presence of a dead body onstage adds to the drama’s spectacle and emotional impact.) But this is only to underline my point: the city in tragedy is often threatened but almost always survives. By the end of

³² Carter (2006), summarized in (2007) 73–78. It occurs to me now that all four of my city-set examples (Sophocles’ *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Euripides’ *Phoenician Women* and *Bacchae*) are Theban plays. I think aspects of my model work elsewhere, but it is interesting that the most complete examples are Theban, since Thebes is the quintessentially vulnerable city in tragedy: see Easterling (1989), *contra* Zeitlin (1986).

Antigone the houses of Laius and Creon may be in ruins but the city itself has still survived a terrible war. The Chorus in their *parodos* (entry song) make it clear how near Thebes came to falling to the invaders; Creon at the beginning of his first speech reassures them that the city is now safe (162–163). The policy that Creon will go on to announce and justify, however muddled he will turn out to be in its implementation, must be considered against the background of the city's vulnerability.

So Creon's policy—if not his practice—is in tune with tragic political values. We can consider how these values are put at stake under two headings, which may be framed as questions. Constraints of space allow me merely to raise them here.

First, does Creon have any authority in the city? Related by marriage to two previous kings (Laius and Oedipus), he was not next in line to the throne of Thebes, but is simply the man left standing after the end of the war. He says himself that he holds the throne 'by reason of my kinship with the dead' (174). 'Kinship' here translates the Greek *anchisteia* ('proximity') a principle by which questions of inheritance were decided in Athenian law. Creon is first referred to by Antigone as *ton stratêgon* ('the general', line 8, which, depending on when the play was first produced, may have put its audience in mind of Pericles).³³ Although others refer to him as a king, Antigone fails to do so throughout: this calls his authority into question.³⁴

Creon's shaky claim to the throne puts one in mind of a Greek tyrant, best defined as king who has assumed power rather than inherited it. Successive commentators, additionally, have referred to Creon as a tyrant by virtue of his cruel and autocratic style of government.³⁵ This description owes a great deal to his apparently fearsome presence. The guard is notably anxious at the prospect of reporting Polyneices' burial (223–236), and Creon (cleverly, perhaps) holds him responsible on pain of death until he can produce a culprit (304–314). Antigone, as I have already observed, says that the Chorus members hold their tongues through fear (509). And, when Haemon reports that—unknown to Creon—the people all support Antigone, he begins by explaining how 'your countenance is alarming to a subject when he speaks words that give you no pleasure' (690–691). So Creon is a tyrant in the manner of his rule, with one exception: he has no bodyguard. Greek tyrants,

³³ Ehrenberg (1954) 105–112. Not even Ehrenberg suggests that Creon is a straight allegory for Pericles, but some parallels can be drawn: see e.g. Meier (1993) 196 ff.

³⁴ Griffith (1999) 122.

³⁵ See e.g. Bowra (1944) 72–78; Ehrenberg (1954) 57–58; Podlecki (1966c); Vickers (1973) 529–530; Winnington-Ingram (1980) 125–127.

typically, are guarded because their position is so insecure; Creon's problem, on the contrary, is that he takes popular support for granted.

Creon's authority, if he has any, ought to be synonymous with the authority of the city. In the prologue Ismene objects to burying Polyneices 'against the will of the people' (*bia politón*, 79).³⁶ She has just heard that this was Creon's proclamation—no sense of democracy here—and she naturally associates Creon's authority with the authority of the city. This assumption is undermined by the emergence of the tyrannical qualities noted above; but it suffers especially from Haemon's news that the citizens do not support Creon after all.³⁷ It has been assumed so far that, since Creon is on the side of the people, the people are on the side of Creon. The king who claimed to do everything on the basis of what is best for the city is now reduced to saying that the city exists to serve him (736–738):

CREON: Must I rule this land for another and not myself?³⁸

HAEMON: Yes, there is no city that belongs to a single man!

CREON: Is not the city thought to belong to its ruler?

Thus Creon's proclamation rests on his own will and not on the rule of law. This again is close to the Greek idea of tyranny.³⁹

This brings us to my second question: should we obey the law, even if it is wrong? In the fourth century this was investigated by Plato in his *Crito*: an account of a conversation set in the year 399 BC, when Socrates had been condemned to death on arguably unjust grounds. In the dialogue Socrates is given the opportunity to escape from prison and flee abroad. Socrates refuses, and chief among his reasons is his respect for the rule of law. As far as Socrates is concerned, by living all his life in the same city he has entered into an unspoken contract with its laws; it would hardly be fair, having enjoyed their protection for so long, to break them at this late stage by leaving prison against their authority. In the final part of the dialogue Socrates imagines a conversation with the Laws themselves (Pl. *Cri.* 50a–b):

Look at it this way. Suppose that while we were preparing to run away from here (or however one would propose to describe it) the Laws and Constitution of Athens were to come and confront us and ask this question,

³⁶ Antigone echoes Ismene's words as late as line 907, but she cannot be expected to know that the citizens all support her: she was not onstage to hear from Haemon.

³⁷ Cf. Meier (1993) 196.

³⁸ There is an ambiguity in the Greek, where ἄλλω ... ἢ μοι can either mean 'by someone else's judgement rather than my own', or 'for anyone else but me': see Griffith (1999) 248.

³⁹ See e.g. Eur. *Suppl.* 429–437; Aeschin. *Ctes.* 6; Arist. *Pol.* 1295a1–23.

'Now, Socrates, what are you proposing to do? Can you deny that by this act which you are contemplating you intend, so far as you have power, to destroy us, the Laws, and the whole State as well? Do you imagine that a city can continue to exist and not be turned upside down, if the legal judgements which are pronounced in it have no force but are nullified and destroyed by private persons?'
(transl. H. Tredennick)

Antigone's response to civic law is equally principled but appears to argue the opposite way. She will not obey the law if it is wrong, and particularly if it goes against divine law (446–455):

CREON: But do you tell me, not at length, but briefly: did you know of the proclamation forbidding this?

ANTIGONE: I knew it; of course I knew it. It was known to all.

CREON: And yet you dared to transgress these laws?

ANTIGONE: Yes, for it was not Zeus who made this proclamation, nor was it Justice who lives with the gods below that established such laws among men, nor did I think your proclamations strong enough to have power to overrule, mortal as they were, the unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods.

The concept of 'unwritten laws' was a slippery piece of rhetoric in ancient Greece: it could be used to mean whatever the speaker wanted it to mean.⁴⁰ Consider the second most famous use of this idea in Greek literature, from the Periclean funeral oration (Thuc. 2.37):

We give our obedience to those whom we put in positions of authority, and we obey the laws themselves, especially those which are for the protection of the oppressed, and those unwritten laws which it is an acknowledged shame to break.
(transl. R. Warner)

The idea of 'acknowledged shame' finds some resonance, but otherwise Pericles (as elsewhere in Thucydides) appears to be arguing in the opposite direction from Antigone, in favour of the authority of the city.⁴¹

However, we should be wary of seeing a competition between man's and god's law in Antigone's speech. For one thing, as Antigone implies, the instruction not to bury Polyneices is not a law but a proclamation; for another, it rests on the authority of one man whose constitutional position, we have seen, is shaky. It may be more helpful to treat Creon's proclamation

⁴⁰ Ostwald (1973); Craik (1993).

⁴¹ Unless we read the play as Bennett/Tyrrell (1990) do. On this reading (see above), Antigone's views echo a position familiar from Athenian funeral orations, which is that the Thebans were wrong not to allow the burial of the Seven.

as a measure that is ‘unconstitutional’ in the light of existing laws. These laws are not written down, to be sure—their only authority is Antigone herself—but the idea of a universal law that sits above civic law appears in a similar context elsewhere in Greek tragedy. When an Athenian herald in Euripides’ *Suppliants* proclaims to the Thebans that they must give up the Argive heroes for burial, this proclamation is made in terms of ‘the law of all the Greeks’ (671–672, echoing 526–527) and ‘that ancient law established by the gods’ (561–563). If there is a political ‘message’ in *Antigone* (a term with which I am uncomfortable) it does not go so far as ‘God’s law trumps man’s law’; but it might go as far as ‘rulers cannot act on their authority alone.’

4. *Death and Life*

Antigone is a morbid figure even by the standards of Greek tragedy, as well she might be. As she is at pains to tell the Chorus, her mother, father, and both brothers are all dead (897–899, quoted below, 911–912). Her wish to join them seems as strong an impulse as the one that leads her to bury Polyneices; and in any case the one act leads to the other. She may invite pity for her fate (806–816, 844–852, 866–871, 872–875, 895–896, 916–920) but she seems at the very least resigned to it, and even to welcome it. Creon taunts Antigone in her absence as someone in love with death, someone who worships the gods below (777–780). While her tragedy culminates in her death, Creon’s tragedy is to survive while others die around him.

Antigone herself invites interpretation in terms of death-life at line 555: ‘you choose life, and I choose death’, spoken to Ismene. In fact this morbidity helps to explain an inconsistent attitude towards her sister. In the very first line of the play Antigone addresses Ismene in affectionate terms (‘My own sister Ismene, linked to myself ...’) and goes on to ask her to join in burying Polyneices. When Ismene refuses, Antigone’s affection becomes hatred (86–89, 93–94). Her attitude does not change later, when Ismene attempts to claim part of the deed and so die with Antigone (536 ff.).⁴² It seems odd that someone so concerned to look after her own *philoï* should reject her only surviving blood relative so fiercely.⁴³ Antigone herself encapsulates, and half-explains, this paradox in line 543: ‘I do not tolerate a loved one who

⁴² There is some softening of her hatred in this later scene, but not much: see Carter (2005) 176–177.

⁴³ Cf. Blundell (1989a) 111–115.

shows her love only in words' (λόγοις δ' ἐγὼ φιλοῦσαν οὐ στέργω φίλην); in other words, Ismene's desire to share responsibility for the deed, when she had no part in the deed itself, is not good enough. One thing Antigone has in common with Creon is a tendency to make a stark division between friends and enemies: if Ismene is not with her, she is against her. Creon, likewise, reacts angrily to disagreement from his own son. Thebes is still on a war footing.

The inconsistency is further explained if we understand that dead *philoí* mean more to Antigone than living ones (71–75, also spoken to Ismene):

Do you be the kind of person you have decided to be, but I shall bury him! It is honourable for me to do this and die. I am his own and I shall lie with him who is my own (φίλη μετ' αὐτοῦ κείσομαι, φίλου μέτα), having committed a crime that is holy, for there will be a longer span of time for me to please those below than there will be to please those here.

Antigone prefers joining her family among the dead to building a family on earth. She dies unmarried (867) and childless: unfulfilled, one might say, as an ancient Greek woman. She even refers to the death she expects to meet in the cave as if it were some kind of perverse marriage ritual (891–899, cf. 810–816, 1204–1205):⁴⁴

O tomb, O bridal chamber, O deep-dug home, to be guarded forever, where I go to join those who are my own, of whom Persephassa has already received a great number, dead, among the shades! Of these I am the last and my descent will be the saddest of all, before the term of my life has come. But when I come there, I am confident that I shall come dear to my father, dear to you, my mother, and dear to you, my own brother (φίλη μὲν ἦξειν πατρί, προσφίλης δὲ σοί, / μῆτερ, φίλη δὲ σοί, καστήνητον κάρα).

In this speech Antigone seems to forget that she is not 'the last', but leaves behind Ismene. (Compare her previous speech, in which she calls herself ἄφίλος, 'friendless', 876.) And in her acceptance of death as a substitute for marriage she ignores (as she does throughout the play) her planned marriage to Haemon. Unknowingly, however, she does look ahead to a kind of grim union with her betrothed, since Haemon will join her in the cave. The messenger who describes the scene says that Creon found Antigone already dead on a makeshift noose and Haemon hanging from her waist, himself on the point of suicide (1206 ff.). One other point, if I may be allowed to stretch my model of tragic space a little further: in the discussion above

⁴⁴ On the theme of marriage and death in *Antigone*, see Segal (1981a) 179–183; Rehm (1994) 59–71; Bennett/Tyrrell (1998) 97–121.

I described the double suicide of Antigone and Haemon as having taken place 'out there'; but in a grim sense the cave becomes the marital home of Antigone and Haemon.

We may here sketch a religious reading of *Antigone*, referring to the proper and improper application of ritual.⁴⁵ Antigone's approach to marriage ritual may be disturbed, but she is all for the proper disposal of the dead. She may be too weak to bury Polyneices herself and does not have Ismene to help her, but she scatters dust on her brother's body (429–431) and (as we have just seen) can claim to have performed the necessary rites. Teiresias also is worried about his ability to conduct sacrifices properly.

Antigone's attitude to marriage and burial is informed by her religious beliefs, and especially her respect for the gods of the underworld;⁴⁶ by contrast, Creon is in the habit of swearing by Olympian Zeus (184, 304–305, 758) and his loyalties are with the gods of the city (199). However, there is another contrast between Antigone's and Creon's religious views: the latter is a religious sceptic, who believes in little beyond the simple authority of Zeus. One can compare Jocasta in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, who becomes wrongly sceptical of oracles (946–949); or Ajax in his play, who thinks he can succeed in battle without divine help (764–777). Antigone's first attempt to bury Polyneices is unobserved, and it is when she goes back that she is caught. The Chorus concludes that this first burial is the work of the gods, a view to which Creon reacts angrily (278–283). When Teiresias offers his warnings, Creon accuses him of corruption (1033 ff.). He expresses disbelief in the concept of miasma, supposing it to be a human contrivance from which the gods are immune (1042–1044).

Perhaps Creon's scepticism can be read alongside his arrogance: like Ajax, he has a little bit too much faith in himself. If so, this helps to explain the presence in the play of one of Sophocles' most brilliant and celebrated choral odes.⁴⁷ This ode comes at the end of the scene we have just considered, when the burial of Polyneices has been reported but the burier not identified. It begins (332–333):

Many things are formidable, and none more formidable than man!

The Chorus goes on to celebrate the achievements of man, taming and exploiting the natural world, conquered only by death. But the ode concludes with a warning (368–375):

⁴⁵ On death ritual in *Antigone*, see essays in Patterson (2006a).

⁴⁶ MacKay (1962) 167 with n4.

⁴⁷ On the significance of the 'Ode to Man' within the play, see Segal (1981a) 152 ff.

When he applies the laws of the earth and the justice the gods have sworn to uphold he is high in the city; outcast from the city is he with whom the ignoble consorts for the sake of gain. May he who does such things never sit by my hearth or share my thoughts!

So much for human religious belief and practice; the place of the gods themselves is a little harder to identify. On one level, there is little or nothing in this drama that would not make sense to an atheist: everything occurs as a result of human, not divine will. Or very nearly everything: in the Chorus' account of the battle that preceded the action, Capaneus is struck by Zeus' thunderbolt (127–133); when Antigone is observed burying Polyneices for the second time, a freak (god-sent?) dust storm adds to the force of the guard's account (417–421); and the behaviour of the carrion birds around the altars is still more spooky. Thus the gods keep their distance from events, they do not motivate the action, but they do add to its meaning.⁴⁸

In other Sophoclean plays the role of the divine is often to create problems for mortals before receding from view: Athena drives Ajax mad in the prologue of his play; Apollo provides troublesome oracles before the start of *Oedipus Tyrannus*; and similarly distant, remembered prophecies inform the action of *Trachiniae*. If there is one character in *Antigone* who fills this divine role, creating problems for men before eventually receding from events, it is Antigone herself. The problem is as much of Creon's making as Antigone's; but his character is more fallible, and so more human. Creon may be the authentic tragic hero, but in *Antigone* we have one of the most compelling characters in the history of Western drama.

⁴⁸ This view comes straight from Kitto (1956) 73, on Sophocles' *Electra*: 'though Apollo does nothing to forward the action, he does as it were accompany it on his higher plane, enlarging its reference, certifying its universal truth'. His chapter on *Antigone* develops this kind of reading; see especially p. 156.

TRACHINIAE

Bruce Heiden

Sophocles' *Trachiniae* dramatizes the crisis of a hero's wife left at home to wait anxiously for her husband's return from a dangerous conflict. When Deianeira learns that Heracles has brought a young concubine under their roof, she tries to ensure his fidelity by secretly exposing him to a substance she believes has aphrodisiac properties. Instead of igniting his passion it burns his flesh severely. Hyllus, the couple's son, accuses his mother of murdering his father, and Deianeira takes her own life. In the drama's conclusion Heracles guarantees his death by declaring that it will fulfil the oracles of his father Zeus, and commands his son to prepare a pyre on Mount Oeta for his immolation.

This summary of the plot of *Trachiniae* describes a story in which the central character, Deianeira, with apparently benign intention but faulty judgement, makes a decision whose disastrous consequences brings terrible suffering upon herself and her whole family. At the same time her hypervirile husband, whose violent sexual passions provoke his wife to her ill-considered plan, through his suffering gains insight into the foreknowledge of the cosmic patriarch, his father Zeus. In recognizing the patriarch's authority and submitting to the necessity of death, Heracles washes away his mortal imperfections and becomes the mythic paradigm of a higher ethical condition.

No recent critic has presented a reading of *Trachiniae* as straightforwardly Aristotelian as that just sketched, but its elements turn up frequently even in discussions with little interest in ethics. Overtly Aristotelian readings of Greek tragedy are now avoided, since they bestow a degree of moral autonomy on the characters, the author, and his chastened audience. The programmatic shift away from personal agency was articulated by Charles Segal in the first sentence of an ambitious essay: 'In the *Trachinian Women* the humanist view of Sophocles as a dramatist of emotion and character meets its greatest stumbling block' (1977/1995, 26). For Segal *Trachiniae* opened a gulf between 'the characters as human beings and the characters as symbolic figures', and it was to the latter that his interpretation turned. Heracles and Deianeira represented coherent but opposed systems of 'values' which the drama brought into conflict; 'the play places us at the

intersection of opposed worlds, at the frontier between man and beast, between civilization and primitive animal drives' (p. 27). Segal's interpretive program drew tacitly upon Hegel's dialectical theory of tragedy and Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of culture. Just a few years later he adopted the terminology of structuralism, and the clash between primitive and civilized values gave way to a textually encoded mediation between nature and culture.¹ Despite its bid to supplant humanist readings, Segal's widely-read and cited work never completely broke its tether to humanism, and to some degree even retained a moralistic terminology, despite deploying it relativistically and without judgement.

Since the 1980s most studies of *Trachiniae* have focused on the characters' ethical traits, but within an anthropological framework that downplays human decision-making and moral responsibility in favour of 'values'. The values considered significant, however, are usually the presumed audience's rather than the characters', and discussions of *Trachiniae* often use the play as a pretext for social history. Interest in gender roles and assumptions of systemic sexism have fostered a trend toward surprisingly negative judgements of Deianeira that casually discount her gentleness, sensitivity, and intelligence—allegedly meaningless to her male accusers in the theatre—while stressing her responsibility for taking the foolish risk that killed her husband.² Feminist interpretations have characterized *Trachiniae* as a specimen of patriarchal ideology in which Deianeira's unforgivable mistake is simply that of presuming to appropriate a 'subjectivity' reserved for males.³

¹ Segal (1981a).

² Carawan (2000); Flashar (2000) 90; Schwab (2006); Hall (2009) 85–88. Much attention has been focused upon Deianeira's decision-making in her brief dialogue with the Chorus when she sought their advice about her plan (584–595). A new translation of line 592 by Solmsen (1985) has convinced many that the Chorus explicitly warned Deianeira against her plan's risk, making her responsible both for devising a risky plan and disregarding prudent advice. Blössner (2002) argues strenuously against Solmsen's translation of line 592; Schwab (2006) defends it. Ryzman (1991) and Gasti (1993) find Deianeira guilty of offence against 'natural law', Bergson (1993) of offence against Eros. Nicolai (1992) 35–37, Lefèvre (2001) 19–26, and Blössner (2002) resist the trend toward harsh judgment, suggesting that Deianeira's reasoning was impaired in an extraordinary crisis by emotion or time pressure. (This extenuation overlooks Deianeira's admission that she kept Nessus' prescription for years [555–559] in anticipation of needing it [578]; see Heiden 1989, 89–90.) Faraone (1994) argues that Deianeira's plan would have won the audience's sympathy because toxic substances were popularly approved for use as aphrodisiacs; Deianeira erred in administering an incorrect dosage.

³ Wohl (1998) 3–56; Ormand (1999) 36–59; Bowman (1999) 345–346; Lyons (2003) 119–124. While sharing the general assumption that the audience's values were pro-male and anti-female, Effe (1995) makes the counter-feminist argument that Sophocles' play challenged

Harsh judgments of Heracles, on the other hand, are discouraged. The presumption that Sophoclean Athens embodied patriarchal ideology, along with the hero's traditional quest to rid the world of monsters to make it safe for humans, combine to support a tendency to excuse or mitigate the brutality, egotism, and humiliation in Sophocles' portrayal.⁴ A few critics hold out in condemning Heracles, some even maintaining that his apotheosis is not implied, and that the play's silence about it signalled Sophocles' anti-traditional and deeply critical view of the mythic hero.⁵ Heracles' critics and defenders alike, however, unite in ascribing the whole tragic action of *Trachiniae* to divine cosmic guidance—on this point the play's final line ('and none of these things is not Zeus', 1278) is considered the dispositive 'last word'.

Little current scholarship on *Trachiniae* treats the play as a provocation to philosophy, i.e. to self-conscious thinking about thinking. It may be admitted that, if the play's catastrophe really arises, as it appears to, from Deianeira's failure to distinguish a sexual medication from a fatal poison, then a philosophical temperament would find little of interest in it. Indications that the tragic problem lies deeper, however, emerged the year after Segal's essay, in a less-noticed study entitled "The Dramatic Epistemology of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*".⁶ Harkening back to the 'late learning' interpretation of Whitman (1951) and its theme of 'uncertainty', Lawrence examined the scenes in *Trachiniae* sequentially and found a 'bewildering parade of information ... which Deianeira [confronts] during the play's action, and which mirrors the epistemological texture of the world' (289). While in the quoted passage Lawrence indicates that Sophocles himself espoused an epistemological theory of radical scepticism, his analyses showed that in scene after scene Sophocles' characters deployed non-sceptical theories of knowledge to discriminate true information from false, often incorrectly.

male attitudes and sought to modify them by manoeuvring the audience into identifying with Deianeira as an equal, sympathizing with her predicament, and viewing Heracles and themselves in an uncomplimentary light.

⁴ On Heracles' comprehension of divine design through the oracles, see Segal (1977/1995) 49–50; Holt (1987) 215–216; Conacher (1997) 31–32; Bowman (1999); Goward (1999) 51; Segal (2000); on his provision for Hyllus' initiation into manhood, see Pozzi (1999); Carawan (2000) 220–226; Alaux (1995) 182–195 (more nuanced and ambivalent); on provision for continuation of the household through the forced betrothal of Hyllus and Iole, see Segal (1977/1995) 45; Rehm (1994) 81–83; Pozzi (1999) 30–33; on preparation for imminent deification, see Segal (1977/1995) 53–61; Holt (1989); Nicolai (1992) 40; Pozzi (1999) 37; Carawan (2000) 221. Extenuators also include Holt (1989) 77–78; Bergson (1993) 109; Scott (1996a) 117–122.

⁵ Ryzman (1991), (1993); Effe (1995); Flashar (2000) 97; Lefèvre (2001) 26–35.

⁶ Lawrence (1978).

Lawrence's 'dramatic epistemology' was taken up by Heiden (1989), to whom the characters' faulty theories of knowledge indicated rhetorical techniques that lured the characters, and the play's spectators as well, into illusion and error. The only thing that Sophocles staged in *Trachiniae* was report: 'Hyllus arrives with a report of reports of Heracles' whereabouts A messenger arrives to report the arrival of [Heracles' herald] Lichas, who has reported the imminent arrival of Heracles; Lichas arrives and narrates what Heracles did in his absence'.⁷ And so forth. If the play's 'dramatic epistemology' casts doubt on the theoretical criteria which the characters use to determine which reports are factual, then it casts doubt on *all* the reports, on everything the characters think they know, on all the conclusions they draw and the decisions they make. Sophocles staged the familiar story of Heracles' death in such a way that the tragic action does not ultimately turn on Deianeira's mistake. The errors made by the characters of *Trachiniae* are indeterminable: the play's dramatic action might very well have been a concatenation of misunderstandings, like the ending of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Or maybe not. But inasmuch as the characters make consequential decisions in the conviction that they possess certain knowledge when they do not, they are constantly in the grip of illusion and exposed to error at every turn. And the spectators in the Theatre of Dionysus were just as exposed. The tragedy declines either to confirm its audiences' assumptions or persuade them of others. It does not even present anything definite enough to be considered sceptical or pessimistic. Instead it lures audiences through familiar myth into a deep and troubling *aporia* where it leaves them to draw what wisdom they can from it.

1. *A Fable about Fact-Finding*

Audiences who saw *Trachiniae* in the Theatre of Dionysus watched a drama whose characters were wives, heroes, and heralds, but besides that and even above it, gatherers and reporters of information—like the citizen-spectators themselves, as one can see from passages in the historians such as this:

... a certain group of individuals in the city itself ... informed the Athenians that the ... various activities on which [the Mytilenians] were so busy were planned ... for the purpose of making a revolt At this time, however, the

⁷ Heiden (1989) 11–12.

Athenians were suffering from the plague Thus, rather through a process of wishful thinking, they at first believed that the accusations were untrue. Later, however ... (Thuc. 3.2–3, transl. R. Warner)

Sophocles' drama projected into the mythic past the fact-finding ambitions and persuasive techniques of the Athenian state in its Periclean moment, staging the scene of a heroic wife's anxious domestic seclusion as if it were the busy public headquarters where a city's leaders received reports from their far-flung interests—or vice versa, as if the Athenian *boulê* or assembly were as remote and out-of-touch as inmates of the notional *gunaikeion*.⁸

The reports arriving at or emanating from Deianeira's 'homequarters' are no more transparently informative than those reaching Thucydides' Athenian assembly. To begin with the obvious, the speaker of one report (Lichas) eventually acknowledges that it is intentionally incomplete and misleading. Many reports predict the future (what Heracles plans to do with Iole in the household, how Deianeira will react to the truth, what Nessus' prescription will do to Heracles). The last two examples are clearly exposed as false or misleading. But no prediction of the future can bear the weight of certainty which those in *Trachiniae* are made to carry. The Messenger who convinces Deianeira that Iole will be her husband's special concubine cannot have known this. He draws an inference (368) based in turn on second-hand report. Iole's future role cannot be predicted with certainty even by Heracles himself, if for no other reason than because the force of erotic attraction was proverbially fickle.⁹ Sophocles' characters do not always know their own emotions; Deianeira doesn't, for she explicitly assures Lichas that she will accept a rival with equanimity (458–462), and later changes her mind. Predictive reports make the future seem certain, when it isn't.¹⁰

A similar uncertainty veils the ultimate effect of Deianeira's plan. When she sends the doctored robe to Heracles she thinks she knows what the treatment will do, but she doesn't; in the following scene, after observing the compound's corrosive effect on a sample of wool, she swings toward a different certainty and infers that the preparation will inevitably prove

⁸ Hall (2009) 90–92 suggests that Deianeira is a surrogate for the Athenian *demos*, notoriously hasty decision-makers.

⁹ See further Heiden (1989) 67–71.

¹⁰ On this general approach, see further Heiden (1989) and Kraus (1991). Goward (1999) 91 analyzes the 'narrative loop' in *Trach.* 180–496, arguing that it suggests alternative directions the drama might have taken.

fatal to Heracles (718). At this point Deianeira cannot even know that her gift is certain to be delivered, much less the extent of harm it will cause her robust husband when applied. Is Deianeira's prediction right? Does she kill Heracles? The question seems otiose, since the story of the poisoned robe was familiar in versions as early as the *Catalogue of Women*. But Sophocles' staging makes it impossible ever to determine whether the drug Deianeira sends Heracles is fatal to him. Hyllus accuses his mother of killing his father (740); but the spectator who concluded that Heracles was dead would have had to revise his view, because after fifty lines of eyewitness description Hyllus finally reveals that Heracles was still alive when Hyllus last saw him, and might still be alive when he arrived in Trachis (806). Heracles is alive when he arrives; and he is still alive at the play's end as attendants carry him off to be immolated ... alive.¹¹ In *Trachiniae* Sophocles took the familiar story of Heracles' death and staged it as a convincing but ultimately conjectural report.

The fabric of reports from which Sophocles wove the dramatic surface of *Trachiniae* was virtually transparent to his characters. When Deianeira hears conflicting reports about her husband she simply decides which is true; from there her concern is entirely with the (putative) facts. All the reports in *Trachiniae* assume that information is easy to acquire in principle, since the world consists of material things accessible to the senses and above all to vision. Sophocles' characters are empiricists. Many of their reports claim derivation from direct experience, often that of an eyewitness, and evoke it through metaphors of vision, light, and immediate presence.¹² Predictions report future facts through an identical rhetoric. Characters report on feelings and intentions—their own or others'—as if the soul were a container of material objects. Again and again they declare cognition of a solid reality that stands directly before them, occupying their field of vision and confining their future to a single, unavoidable path. Facts are faced, necessity accepted. This picture of reality occludes the verbal medium and its personal human sources, as well as the uncertainty of what is or can be known.

For several characters in *Trachiniae* the claim of cognitive immediacy extends beyond concrete material particulars to general patterns. Deianeira and the Chorus draw inferences from particular facts, confident that

¹¹ See further Heiden (1989) 108–118.

¹² Lawrence (1978); Heiden (1989). Holt (1987) discusses imagery of light.

physical matter obeys immanent, impersonal, and necessary forces.¹³ In the *parodos* the Chorus evokes cosmic cycles of day and night, rising and sleeping, joy and sorrow. Deianeira claims an understanding of 'human nature' (τάνθρώπων ... πέφυκεν, 439–440) in which Eros acts as an impersonal force whose compulsion leaves neither god nor mortal any alternative to submission. She has a theory of existence: it is *phusis*. Deianeira feels certain that Iole will replace her in Heracles' bed because that is simply nature's way: Iole is physically younger, and Heracles' eyes and feet will inevitably follow their natures (549). Thus the problem Deianeira foresees in her household is not really her husband's infidelity to her, but his automatic obedience to impersonal biology. She therefore turns to a compound of natural ingredients whose effect, she has been told, will interrupt the link between her husband's sight of another woman and his reflex of arousal (ὥστε μήτιν' εἰσιδὼν/στέρξει γυναικα, 576–577). As a naturalist Deianeira assumes without question that Heracles' attraction to her or any woman can never be anything but the uncontrollable appetite of one body for another; rather than resist the nature that she believes has compelled her husband to neglect her, Deianeira tries to exploit it by channelling Heracles' sexual appetite onto a single possible object, her body. The problem with this plan lies deeper than its failure; even if it succeeded, it would only have made Deianeira the exclusive victim of Heracles' rapes.

Heracles too is obsessed by the necessity of *phusis*.¹⁴ To him the most incomprehensible and aggravating thing about his injury is that someone of the physically weaker sex has inflicted it (1062), and it has impaired his own male nature, turning it female (1075). He refers obsessively to Zeus as his biological progenitor (Ζηνὸς ... γόνος, 1106; Διὸς ... τοῦ με φύσαντος, 1185; etc.) and to Hyllus as his own biological offspring. For Heracles the authority of a father was that of compelling his son to serve as his father's physical extension and biological reproduction: if Hyllus refused to obey his father, he would not be a disobedient son, but the son of another father altogether (1064, 1204–1205).¹⁵ Ironically, Heracles like Deianeira values a sort of sexual exclusivity which he views through the lens of nature and

¹³ See further Heiden (1989). Segal (1977/1995) 29–37 discusses nature as a theme in the play's poetry (as opposed to any particular character's thought or rhetoric). Ryzman (1991) and Gasti (1993) both discuss a sort of philosophical naturalism in *Trachiniae*, which they ascribe to Sophocles.

¹⁴ Heiden (1989) 140–144.

¹⁵ Heiden (1989) 141; Alaux (1995) 188–192.

reproduction. He insists that after his death his sexual partner Iole can have no other partner except Heracles' son. This mate will not succeed the first but replace him as an equivalent, because, as Heracles sees it, he and his son share the same seed (he refers to Hyllus' siblings as τὸ πᾶν μοι σπέρμα σῶν ὁμαιμόνων, 1147). In requiring Hyllus to exclude other partners from Iole's bed by occupying it himself, Heracles ensures that her offspring will reproduce Heracles' seed and his alone. Heracles thereby endeavours to make Iole a very different mother than his own, for the procreation of Alcmena and her husband Amphitryon was occasion for much uncertainty and doubtful report.

Trachiniae assaults the ears of its audience with an amplified rhetoric of certainty which is only the louder for the anxious doubts that need to be silenced or drowned out. This staging of a familiar story prompts the attentive onlooker into unresolvable doubts about what he really knows. The idea of 'knowledge of ignorance' was not born with Socrates or unique to him. It was ancient; in the very first lines of *Trachiniae* Deianeira refers to a version of it.

There is an ancient saying among men, once revealed to them, that you cannot understand a man's life before he is dead, so as to know whether he has a good or bad one. But I know well, even before going to Hades, that the one I have is unfortunate and sorrowful. While I still lived in the house of my father Oeneus
(1-7)

In claiming that her life has obeyed a fixed pattern which could be rationally inferred from facts she knew from experience, Deianeira presents herself as the confident possessor of a dependable historical methodology, and as a self-conscious modernist whose insight into truth has been won by rejecting the ungrounded commonplaces of traditional belief. The particular out-of-date maxim which she rejects was popularly associated with the Athenian statesman Solon, who in Herodotus uttered a version of it to the Lydian king Croesus (Hdt. 1.32.5). Like Deianeira Croesus too rejected Solon's maxim. The significance of Sophocles' play comes into sharper relief when considered alongside Herodotus' story.¹⁶

¹⁶ Saïd (2002) 135 sees connection between *Trachiniae* and Herodotus' Croesus story through similarities shared by Adrastus and Deianeira, both unintentional homicides who take their own lives. She also compares Heracles and Cambyzes (130-131). Schwab (2006) 38, 53 compares the deliberations of Deianeira and Xerxes.

2. Smarter Than Solon: Deianeira and Herodotus' Report on Croesus

According to Herodotus Croesus deemed his famous Athenian visitor ignorant because he dismissed goods on hand like the wealth he had seen in Croesus' storerooms, and instead bid the king look to the conclusion of every matter (Hdt. 1.33). Nevertheless, something of Solon's warning must have stuck with Croesus, for he became obsessively anxious about the future, and sought advance knowledge from the gods through dreams and oracles. He thought the gods could be moved by expensive dedications, and information was all he thought he needed or expected to get. Croesus turned to the gods not in blind faith but as a critical investigator: he devised an empirical test of oracular clairvoyance, which included a methodical determination of the exact time when each oracle was consulted, measured by counting the passage of days (compare the confusing indications of exact lapse of time-units in the oracles of *Trachiniae*). Only two oracles passed Croesus' rigorous test and won his acceptance as creditworthy. He consulted Delphi and took encouragement from a response predicting he need only fear defeat in war under a condition that appeared impossible to fulfil, but wasn't (a 'mule' ruling the Medes; Hdt. 1.55–56; 1.91.5); this too finds a counterpart in *Trachiniae*, where Heracles receives an oracle predicting that his death could only occur under the apparently impossible circumstance that nobody living would kill him (1159–1161; this was the centaur Nessus).¹⁷

Like Croesus, Deianeira rejects Solon's unpredictable wisdom and turns for information to messengers and oracles, and finally to Nessus' prescription, whose words she preserves and obeys with the same meticulous reverence accorded oracular pronouncements (680–684). Croesus eventually changed his mind about Solon's maxim when he was about to be burned alive on a pyre by his conqueror Cyrus of Persia (Hdt. 1.86–87). As the flames were about to engulf him, Croesus cried out to Apollo for help, and a sudden shower doused the pyre and saved his life. Since *Trachiniae* culminated in the preparation of a pyre for Deianeira's husband Heracles, from which it is implied that he will be rescued and made immortal, the play's allusions to Herodotus' story of Croesus appear to be systemic.

Herodotus' storytelling illuminates the significance of Croesus' ill-considered decisions and can also illuminate Deianeira's. After Croesus was rescued from the pyre, he told Cyrus that he attacked the Persians because

¹⁷ Heracles' recognition also bears comparison to Cambyses' (see note 16 above) and Polyphemus' in the *Odyssey* (see pp. 144–147 below).

Apollo incited him to (Hdt. 1.87.3). But this was not quite true; as Herodotus tells the story, Croesus' errors began *before* he misinterpreted Apollo's oracles and even before he consulted Delphi. Croesus only decided to consult the oracles after his perception of the Persians' increasing power (αὐξανόμενα, αὐξανομένην) moved him to interrupt its growth before it became too great (Hdt. 1.46.1). Thus like Deianeira Croesus attempted to forestall a problem he anticipated as the outcome of a unidirectional and natural (or in Croesus' case, quasi-natural) trend. But Herodotus also suggests that Croesus' anxiety arose from a specific misjudgment.

When Cyrus asked Croesus who persuaded him to make war on the Persians, his question did not imply that Croesus should have bowed to necessity and prudently submitted to a superior power; rather it stated explicitly that Croesus erred in choosing to be Cyrus' enemy instead of his friend (πολέμιον ἀντὶ φίλου ἐμοὶ καταστήναι, Hdt. 1.87.3). Through Cyrus' question Herodotus prompts his reader to see a factor that Croesus overlooked. Whether the Persians posed a threat to Croesus was not purely a function of impersonal matter and its growth, but of what Cyrus, as a personal agent, might choose to do. Croesus' critical error lay in overlooking the personal dimension that gave the facts significance. This error arose from the same materialist outlook that also led Croesus to reject Solon's wisdom and instead place his confidence in the security of possessions.

Croesus' reliance upon Apollo's oracles involved a similar error: what he misunderstood was not only the meaning of the oracular words, but even more fundamentally that they were not simply disclosures of future facts but utterances of a divine personal agent. When Croesus sent an emissary to Delphi to accuse the god of misleading him and improperly reciprocating his gifts (as if Apollo had reneged on a deal with Croesus), the Pythia's reply revealed that Croesus' future had never been a pre-inscribed sequence of events on which Apollo might have supplied accurate advance information. The eventual facts were affected by divine decisions, and on Croesus' behalf Apollo had obtained concessions from the Moirai; these included permission to save Croesus on the pyre (Hdt. 1.91.2–3). Apollo actually was more to Croesus than an informant: he was Croesus' friend. Cyrus too became Croesus' friend eventually and might have befriended him sooner if given the chance. Croesus' materialist, impersonal view of existence obscured the personal dimension and its possibilities.

Like Croesus Deianeira generally views the universe as consisting of impersonal matter, and overlooks the personal in evaluating her problem and planning a solution. As we have noted, Deianeira regards her husband's sexual relationships as expressions of a natural compulsion. Her marriage to

Heracles has had scarcely anything of personal choice about it even from the very beginning: neither she nor her father chose her husband, and if Heracles chose anything it was a bed (λέχος ... κριτόν, 27) and a parcel of arable real estate for profitable cultivation (32), metaphors for an anonymous, inanimate resource for satisfying sexual appetite and breeding offspring.¹⁸ In using these terms Deianeira has retained a bare trace of the personal by implying that she is her husband's personal property. But the news about Iole convinces her that Heracles' possessions are mere commodities: Deianeira is an employee hired to maintain a stranger's house, Iole a commodity shipped as payment in kind, under false bill of lading (537–542), and Heracles a cheating employer (compare with Croesus' reproach of Apollo's repayment, Hdt. 1.90.4).

Although Deianeira's personal feelings have been hurt (535, 538) she is under no illusion that Nessus' erotic drug will restore a personal relationship she neither has nor expects: she seeks only to preserve her dignity before an anonymous public that knows her as Heracles' wife (550–551). But the (for her) almost unimaginable possibility of a voluntary household partnership of spouses is the exact counterpart of the friendship with Cyrus which Croesus also overlooked. Like Croesus Deianeira seeks a remedy in words, Nessus' prescription, which she not only miscomprehends, but accepts to the letter as factual information, as if it had no personal source. Equally certain that the dying centaur was harmless and that her husband is not, Deianeira probes neither. Her confidence in the dominion of impersonal nature blinds her to the personal dimension.

The characters in *Trachiniae* cannot make friendships, alliances, or any agreements undertaken and honoured voluntarily. They neither trust others nor mistrust them, because they believe in necessity rather than personal choices for which one can take responsibility. But the remnant of trust survives in their speech, where πιστός and related words denote not a speaker's fidelity to a personal addressee, but to facts (τὸ πιστόν τῆς ἀληθείας, 398), belief in things said or done (μύθοις ... πιστεύειν, 67; μαντεία πιστά, 77; πίστις ἐν τοῖς δρωμένοις, 588), or the mechanically exact repetition of words (286, 623). Even when Deianeira complained that Heracles does not deserve his reputation as 'trusted' (πιστός, 541) her only explicit accusation is that he has stiffed a good employee of her earned wages (οἰκούρι', 542). References to 'gifts' (494, 555) similarly gesture toward absent personal relationships in which the exchange of gifts might really have been possible. The oaths that

¹⁸ Note also that the union of Hyllus and Iole was compulsory upon both partners.

Hyllus swears to carry out his father's wishes are not exceptions, but traces of an obsolete possibility in an empty formula. In exploiting the authority of biological paternity to exact a commitment of blind obedience, Heracles transforms the oath from a sign of voluntary good faith into a confirmation of necessity; a son can obey his father, but he cannot keep faith with him; without the ability to choose, the minimal condition of fidelity is lacking.

3. *Three Pyres: Herodotus, Bacchylides, and Sophocles*

Herodotus' Croesus and Sophocles' Heracles both ascend pyres and both are the beneficiaries of interventions deemed divine (in Heracles' case, the implicit sequel to the last scene of *Trachiniae*). Both figures misunderstand oracles and both experience flashes of recognition. Heracles' recognition, however, concerns the misunderstood oracles, while Croesus thought that he understood the oracles perfectly well until he received the Pythia's explanation (Hdt. 1.91.4–6). Croesus' moment of insight instead concerns the wisdom of Solon's maxim: as on the pyre he faces the ultimate catastrophe, Croesus realizes that Solon's saying was spoken 'with god' (σὺν θεῷ, 1.86.3). After rejecting Solon's advice and seeking future facts in divine predictions from empirically tested sources, Croesus finally concludes that Solon's non-oracular and non-predictive words also had a divine source, and moreover that they were true while the oracles from Delphi were not. Thus Solon, whom Croesus says spoke 'no more to him individually than to all mankind' (1.86.5), replaces the Pythia in his estimation. Herodotus' story, in other words, tells how a king who sought advantage by obtaining factual information pertinent to his own individual fortunes was moved to acknowledge that he should have sought universal wisdom.

Heracles' insight is exactly the opposite. He claims to have grasped the factual truth of his own father's predictions which reported to Heracles individually the exact time and manner of his death. But this loud proclamation of certainty is undercut by Sophocles' staging in the manner we have already observed. Heracles' death only occurs when he decides it should and orders a pyre to be prepared for him. Moreover one of the predictions was a translation of inarticulate sounds from the 'multi-tongued oak' of Dodona (1166–1168), and there can be no certainty that the priests who put these sounds into Greek correctly understood their meaning. Finally, Heracles' very act of reinterpretation demonstrates that the meaning of oracles in Greek cannot be determined definitively from knowledge of the Greek language; and since he has no alternative basis for determining exactly what

the oracles' words meant, he has no secure basis at all.¹⁹ The oracles and the facts fit together because Heracles manipulates both to make them fit. His announcement of the oracles' factual truth is the play's crowning instance of ignorance proclaiming itself as knowledge. Sophocles' Heracles is an anti-Croesus and anti-Solon; in short, an anti-philosopher.

Heracles' orders for the construction of the pyre imply that he will die on it (1163, 1172–1173, 1201–1202, 1256). But as we have already mentioned, stories about Heracles often relate that a divine intervention raises him to Olympus. Since, as Segal explained, 'It is inconceivable that the ending of the myth could not have been present in [Sophocles'] and his audience's minds',²⁰ in stopping where it did *Trachiniae* also implied this familiar conclusion. But knowing the implicit sequel to the *exodos* solves only the most superficial problem that the ending of *Trachiniae* posed. The opening paragraph of Herodotus' *Histories* shows that Greek myths circulated in rationalized versions which replaced the poetic divinities and their deeds with humans performing acts that were possible within a natural framework (Hdt. 1.1–5). Herodotus clearly acknowledged that his readers knew other versions (1.2.1), i.e. the poetic myths, but he leaves open the relationship between the poetic and rationalized versions (1.5.3). Herodotus' sole reference to Heracles' immolation (7.198.2) treads the same line. Sophocles' *Trachiniae* was a completely naturalistic dramatization of Heracles' death: the personal deities of myth were absent except in name, and the mortal characters were obsessed with nature and impersonal necessity. In such a play, what form would the familiar sequel have taken?

And what would have been the significance of imagining the sequel in any particular way? Herodotus' story of Croesus' rescue is not only an account of something that supposedly happened, but a provocation to meditation about what kinds of things *could* happen. Moreover it looks back to another rendering of Croesus' rescue, Bacchylides 3, which also included a version of Solon's maxim (Bacchyl. 3.79–80).²¹ Thus what Sophocles left implicit was not only a scene with a certain dramatic content, but a complicated and evolving literary dialogue about miraculous divine interventions. This dialogue is what a discussion of the *exodos* and sequel of *Trachiniae* really needs to reconstruct.

¹⁹ Heiden (1989) 145–148; on the language of Delphic oracles, see also Heiden (2005) 236–239.

²⁰ Segal (1977/1995) 53. Holt (1989) is the most extensive analysis of the evidence and previous discussions.

²¹ Calame (1998) 209–210 has briefly compared Heracles' immolation in *Trachiniae* with Croesus' in Bacchylides 3.

In *Trachiniae* the final words of the Nurse's speech on Deianeira's suicide (943–946) more closely resemble Bacchylides' version of the maxim than they do Deianeira's (2–3). Unlike Herodotus' Croesus, Bacchylides' is not condemned to the pyre by his conqueror but plans his own immolation to spare himself further suffering; furthermore, Croesus is taken by Apollo to live among the blessed Hyperboreans.²² With respect to these features the *exodos* and implicit apotheosis of *Trachiniae* are closer to Bacchylides' version than they were to Herodotus'. On the other hand, Herodotus' version was semi-naturalized and in that respect closer to the dramatic staging of *Trachiniae*. In Herodotus, Croesus was saved unexpectedly and perhaps miraculously, but he was not whisked off to a mythical land. Where Bacchylides said that Zeus placed a rain cloud over the pyre (3.55), Herodotus demurred, instead reporting second-hand (λέγεται, 1.87.1) that when Croesus prayed to Apollo the clouds 'ran together' (συνδραμείν, 1.87.2) out of a clear sky. Where Bacchylides affirmed that Apollo rescued Croesus because of his piety (3.61–62), according to Herodotus it was Cyrus who concluded from the rescue that Croesus was 'a good man and beloved by god' (Hdt. 1.87.2). The prudent maxim which Bacchylides said Apollo told to Admetus (i.e. spoken *by* a god) was told in Herodotus' version by the mortal Solon, but, as Croesus later realized, it was spoken 'with god'. Thus while Bacchylides told Hieron and other mortals a story about what the gods did for Croesus, Herodotus' story told what mortals like Croesus and Cyrus inferred about the gods from their own experiences with fellow mortals.

Herodotus frames Croesus' quasi-divine rescue in terms of doubt about the gods and an attempt at investigation. He explicitly conjectures that Cyrus may have planned the immolation as an experiment, to find out whether a god would intervene to save the reputedly pious Croesus from being burned alive (Hdt. 1.86.2). This conjecture placed Cyrus virtually in the position of someone who had already heard Bacchylides' poem about the pious Croesus' salvation—someone like Hieron, for whom Bacchylides' story was framed as a token of what he as a generous despot might expect for himself (Bacchyl. 3.63–66). Cyrus, however, would not take a poet's word for such a miracle; he wanted to see for himself, and used Croesus as the human subject of a test of the gods' gratitude for piety. The rainstorm convinced Cyrus that the gods passed his test.

²² The versions of Bacchylides and Herodotus have been compared (on the whole differently) by Segal (1971).

In the *exodos* of *Trachiniae* Heracles proclaims the factual accuracy of the oracles and the necessity of his death with absolute certainty, and in commanding Hyllus he allows his son no uncertainty. The words of blame that Hyllus directs against the gods in the play's final anapaests look back to Croesus' bitter protest in Bacchylides, when the king thought the gods' ingratitude and indifference to his city's suffering were manifest and irreversible: (ποῦ θεῶν ἐστὶν χάρις; 3.38). Hyllus is just as certain in his despair (1266–1269), but he blames the gods for indifference to their own biological offspring (φύσσαντες, 1268), a naturalist's complaint. In Bacchylides' story the salvation of Croesus is supernatural, a miracle.

Bacchylides did not expect his story of Croesus' salvation to be casually accepted as factual. Immediately after narrating how Zeus sent the rain-cloud to extinguish the pyre, and before Apollo carried Croesus to safety, he inserts this narratorial comment: 'Nothing is untrustworthy which the gods' concern makes happen' (ἄπιστον οὐδέν, ὃ τι θεῶν μέριμνα/τεύχει, Bacchyl. 3.57–58). The point of this cannot have been to convince Hieron that his pious dedications would bring him eternal life, if only because a few stanzas later Bacchylides reports the two maxims that Apollo himself said were the only ones a mortal should cherish: think of tomorrow as your only day, and expect to live in prosperity for fifty years (3.78–84). But Apollo then adds something that a wealthy and powerful man like Hieron might have thought even more incredible than the story of Croesus' blessedness: 'Rejoice in performing deeds of holiness. This is the greatest gain' (κερδέων ὑπέρτατον, 3.83–84). The injunction 'Nothing is untrustworthy which the gods' concern makes happen' means that nobody should doubt either the gods' gratitude to the pious or their ability to perform miracles, whether through mythical deeds or words of wisdom.

In leaving the sequel to Heracles' immolation implicit at the end of *Trachiniae*, Sophocles put his audience in the position of imagining a miraculous Bacchylidean appendix to a naturalistic play whose characters and staging distinguished πιστόν from ἄπιστον and scrupulously rejected the latter. Gods who could transform Heracles' expiration into eternal life on Olympus were divine personal agents for whom nothing was impossible; indeed, since Heracles, unlike Croesus, was better known for pollution than piety, his apotheosis could not even be construed as justice, but only as an act of grace. Therefore the characters are mistaken to demand certainty and submit to necessity: however intractable their dilemmas appear, with the gods' help anything is possible, so there is always reason to hope.

But ἄπιστον οὐδέν was unthinkable to the characters in *Trachiniae*, for their universe lacks either miracles or trust. In fact, the final words of

Trachiniae exactly contradict Bacchylides in attributing all the play's novel sufferings (καينوπαθῆ) to Zeus. But Sophocles' 'curtain line' suggests the unsaid, opposite thought, even in its faintly Bacchylidean sound: (κοῦδ' ἐν τούτων ὃ τι μὴ Ζεὺς, 1278). These sufferings were not Zeus, but without Zeus, befalling mortals whose only divinity is nature known by *phusis* and other names.

4. *No Homers Needed*

As the dramatization of a faithful wife's deliberations while awaiting her heroic husband's return, *Trachiniae* obviously also invited comparison to the story of Penelope and Odysseus in the *Odyssey*.²³ The fact-finding theme in *Trachiniae* recalled the efforts of Penelope and Telemachus to obtain news of Odysseus. Deianeira's fear that a female slave in her home would share her husband's bed had a counterpart in the household of Odysseus' father and mother, where Laertes once brought home an attractive young female slave, but never took her to bed because he feared his wife's anger (*Od.* 1.430–433). The deadly outcome of Deianeira's plan also suggests Agamemnon's fatal return to Clytaemestra, a homecoming that the *Odyssey* had explicitly contrasted with the happy reunion of faithful Penelope and Odysseus.²⁴

The *Odyssey* thematized a kind of naturalism in Penelope's lawless suitors and especially in the Cyclopes, whose natural needs, according to Odysseus, were all satisfied by the gods without the Cyclopes having to do anything: they did not work, observed no laws or taboos, and formed no friendships, i.e. no social relationships except with their biological children and their children's mothers (*Od.* 9.105–115). Polyphemus, the son of Poseidon, was a model for Heracles in *Trachiniae*, who brains his herald Lichas against a rock (*Trach.* 779–782) just as the Cyclops brained Odysseus' crewmen before he ate them (*Od.* 9.289–291). The Cyclopes were polygamous (ἑκάστος ... ἀλόχων, 9.114–115), and so in a sense was Heracles, which contributed greatly to his catastrophe. Although Polyphemus was warned by a prophet that a certain man named Odysseus would take his eyesight, the giant was

²³ For previous discussions, see Garner (1990) 100–108; Fowler (1999) 161–165; Davidson (2003). Segal's writings on *Trachiniae* have many scattered observations touching upon the *Odyssey*; see e.g. Segal (1977/1995) 44.

²⁴ For comparison of *Trachiniae* to Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, see Easterling (1982) 21–22 and Garner (1990) 100–110.

on the lookout for someone physically big, strong, and impressive in appearance (9.512–514). But when his nemesis boastfully revealed his name was Odysseus, Polyphemus suddenly recognized that the prophecy had been fulfilled by an unforeseen foe, the little visitor who called himself Nobody (*Od.* 9.502–517). In *Trachiniae* Sophocles transformed this scene into Heracles' flash of recognition when he hears the name of Nessus and concludes that the dead centaur was the 'nobody living' (τῶν πνεόντων μηδενός, 1160) his father had predicted would kill him (1141–1173).

The personal dimension submerged in *Trachiniae* is front and centre in the *Odyssey*. Homer's main characters sought news eagerly, but never succumbed to certainty that they had all the facts. In the *Odyssey* the test of a good report was surprisingly not its factual informativeness or plausibility, but the personal trustworthiness (i.e. friendship-worthiness) of its teller. When Penelope tested the vagrant beggar (Odysseus incognito), she sought not news of her husband's whereabouts, but confirmation of his identity by a shared emory (*Od.* 19.215–248); when the stranger correctly described Odysseus' clothing, he thereby convinced Penelope that he was once her husband's personal friend (which of course was not factually true). Penelope then accepted this personal friend of her husband as her own personal friend. But when he offered information about Odysseus' current whereabouts and a prediction of his imminent return, Penelope expressed a wish that her guest might be right, but declined to believe it (*Od.* 19.309–316).²⁵

Penelope longed for news of her husband as much as Deianeira, but with far more circumspection, and—at first glance paradoxically—far more hope. Since Penelope never foreclosed the possibility that something might change her luck, no news could be good news. When she learned from her servant Eurycleia that Telemachus had surreptitiously sailed on a dangerous voyage for reports of his father, she panicked; but Eurycleia instructed her mistress to pray to Athena, and she did. Later Athena sent Penelope a dream to reassure her of the goddess's benevolence. Penelope requested information about her husband, but the dream declined to say whether he was alive or dead. Nevertheless when Penelope awoke she felt relieved (*Od.* 4.840–841). She had faith in Athena, and this sustained her fidelity and patience. In *Trachiniae*, when Deianeira is worried because she has heard nothing from Heracles in fifteen months, her nurse instructs her to send Hyllus out in search of information (49–57). This brief scene condenses the

²⁵ Heiden (2007) 165–168.

whole technique and significance of Sophocles' transformation of Homer's *Odyssey*: the demand for information replaces faith in the gods, or in other mortals.

By modelling Heracles upon Polyphemus, Sophocles indicates that the savage conduct of Zeus' son is neither a temporary outburst nor a purely individual flaw, but symptomatic of a diminished sense of divinity that scarcely distinguishes gods from nature. Odysseus' description of the Cyclopes makes clear that their brutality was due to what they lacked in imagination—laws, institutions, reverence—rather than a surplus of natural appetite or passion. Likewise Heracles' violence is only to be expected from anyone without a concept that *phusis* should be restrained. Polyphemus, Poseidon's biological son, felt that his manifest physical power greatly exceeded the gods' (which was not manifest); he told Odysseus that Cyclopes were unintimidated by the gods, and would not hesitate to abuse a guest for fear of divine disapproval (*Od.* 9.275–279). Polyphemus obeyed only his own impulses (θυμός, 9.278). He also told Odysseus that reverence for the gods was a mark of stupidity or provincialism (9.273), showing that he regarded contempt for the gods as a mark of enlightened culture.

Heracles does not fear the gods either: he tells his son Hyllus that submission to his biological father is the fairest law (νόμον/κάλλιστον, 1177–1178), and justice consists of obedience to him (τοῦ φυτεύσαντος χλῦειν, 1244). Heracles even teaches his son not to worry about offending the gods, so long as he does what pleases his biological father: he assures Hyllus that the gods back his paternal authority (1245–1248). Heracles is the law for his son, as the Cyclopes were for theirs. Heracles' flash of recognition into the (supposed) meaning of the oracles unites him in blindness with Polyphemus, and not only metaphorically (see 1104 and 1144). As Odysseus sailed away from Polyphemus he shouted out that the Cyclops was punished by the gods for eating his guests (*Od.* 9.478–479). This meant nothing to Polyphemus, who after learning his clever guest's name only regretted misunderstanding the prophecy, and sarcastically offered Odysseus his curse as a gift of hospitality (9.517–518). Heracles, likewise, is told that his catastrophe occurred because of a violation of trust, when Hyllus explains why Deianeira sent the doctored robe (1138–1139). Heracles pays no attention to his wife's motives; his only response is to ask where she got the poison (1140). When seconds later Heracles recognizes that his killer was the 'nobody living' predicted by the oracle, he never again mentions Deianeira and never gives her another thought as his wife or his killer: Heracles had as little understanding as Polyphemus of the aborted personal relationship that has precipitated his catastrophe, and if anything Heracles has even less understanding

after his supposed decipherment of the oracles than he did before, when at least he thought he was suffering because of something his wife did to him.

In the *Odyssey* Homer's personal gods acted out of explicit choices to be faithful to relationships. The epic action began as Athena accused her father Zeus of unfaithfulness to Odysseus for allowing Calypso to detain him on her island (*Od.* 1.59–62). Athena was also angry at the Ithacans for forgetting the kindness of their absent king Odysseus (*Od.* 5.7–20). Odysseus' return to his faithful wife depended upon the faithfulness of Athena and Zeus to him, and his to them. Like Hieron or any addressee of Bacchylides 3, Odysseus had to trust the gods to bestow blessings other than obviously natural ones, like translating a mortal to live among the Hyperboreans, for Odysseus could only begin his return to Penelope after *declining* an offer of immortality. What Calypso dangled before the hero's eyes was a nature forever free from care and able to satisfy its sexual appetites with a mate whose youthful attractions necessarily surpassed anything a mortal woman could show (*Od.* 5.209–212). Looking directly at the incomparably desirable goddess, Odysseus declined, because he longed for the home and wife his eyes had not seen in years (*Od.* 5.215–220). The faithful homecoming of Odysseus to his faithful friends and family is reversed by Sophocles in the catastrophic return of Heracles, even to the implicit apotheosis that grants Heracles the immortal nature Odysseus wisely refused when given the choice.

No doubt many in Sophocles' audiences had their minds on matters more satisfying or morally reassuring than the inchoate dialogue between Greek writers outlined in this essay. For every Socrates there were many more Thrasymachuses and Strepsiadeses. In Pericles' Funeral Oration the architect of Athens' empire and its ideology declared the city Homer's successor and replacement,²⁶ proclaiming Athens an 'education' (Thuc. 2.41) and assuring his people that their power had earned them greater and more lasting renown than the heroes of mythic poetry.

Mighty indeed are the marks and monuments of our empire which we have left. Future ages will wonder at us, as the present age wonders at us now. We do not need the praises of a Homer, or of anyone else whose words may delight us for the moment, but whose estimation of facts will fall short of what is really true.
(Thuc. 2.41, transl. R. Warner)

²⁶ The Periclean ideology of Athenian autarky has been seen as a conscious dismissal of Solon's wisdom by the whole *polis*; see Raaflaub (2002) 169, with the bibliography in n65.

Athenians who craved factual reports received from Sophocles a vivid, plausible, down-to-earth re-enactment of the events that led to Heracles' death; from their seats in the Theatre of Dionysus they must almost have felt like eyewitnesses. But as a poetic composition in dialogue with the *Odyssey* and other classics, *Trachiniae* also allowed a glimpse at what stories of heroes would be without Homers to tell them, and what a community would be without its Muses: mortals imagined no faithful personal gods, and could imagine themselves as nothing more than helpless objects of nature; lacking the minimal conditions of trust, inhabitants of the same household tore themselves and one another to pieces, and did not even have to be enemies to do it. For a city that fancied itself the new and improved education of all Greece, it was not a fable idly told.

PHILOCTETES

Poulcheria Kyriakou*

'Everything is distasteful, when a man has abandoned his own nature and is doing what is unlike him', laments Neoptolemus in *Philoctetes* (902–903), shortly before he reveals to the unsuspecting Philoctetes the deceit he has been practising. His interlocutor assures him that he is not doing or saying anything unlike his father in helping a noble man (904–905). Neoptolemus indicates his long-standing distress at the prospect of being revealed as a villain (906), drawing the following response from Philoctetes: 'Not on account of your actions; but your words frighten me' (907). Placed just before the major turning point of the plot, this exchange between two of the principals captures several themes that run through this intriguing play: nature, understood as inborn attributes inherited from one's ancestors, especially one's father; integrity, as manifested in word and deed; the nexus of favours and solidarity that define and connect the community of noble men, and the unsettling power of words to confuse, deceive, or harm a man's reputation.

This representative list does not exhaust the thematic range of *Philoctetes*, one of Sophocles' latest and most layered works, which explores the moral limits of the pursuit of benefit, nobility, and glory. This exploration often involves the process of constructing narratives of the past and highlights its metatheatrical ramifications. The play dramatizes an episode from the Trojan saga, the mission sent by the Achaean army to Lemnos to fetch the famous archer Philoctetes. He had been abandoned on the island because of a nasty wound when the army was sailing to Troy but eventually turned out to be indispensable for the capture of Troy, according to a prophecy given by the captive Trojan seer Helenus. *Philoctetes* was produced in 409 BC, when Athens had recently emerged from a period of great military setbacks and political upheaval. The city still faced serious threats, which may have contributed to the shaping of the play's plot.¹ The

* Many thanks to the editor for his suggestions on the penultimate draft of this chapter.

¹ For the possible political ramifications of the play, see recently Lefèvre (2001) 273–275, and Jouanna (2007) 67–72. Vickers (1987) and (2008) 59–81, with an extremely far-fetched argument, and Bowie (1997), more cautiously, suggest that the play tackles the issue of

intertextual web of the plot includes strands not only from the poetic tradition² but also from Sophocles' own previous work: the eponymous character is quite similar to other Sophoclean heroes such as Ajax, Electra, and Antigone in his moral stature and extreme intransigence, and his ability to influence others with his powerful narratives prefigures Oedipus' extraordinary powers in *Oedipus at Colonus*.

1. *Philoctetes: Isolation and Hatred*

Against this background, it can hardly be accidental that *Philoctetes*' opening draws attention to its two most crucial innovations: the scene, Lemnos, is an uninhabited island (1–2), and Neoptolemus, the son of the great Achilles, is one of the characters (3–4). The first innovation is obviously meant to enhance the effect of Philoctetes' isolation, which he repeatedly laments (227–228, 470–472, 486–487, 954; cf. 169–172, 183). A prolonged stay in an island wilderness and residence in a cave, without even basic civilized comforts such as bread and wine (707–709, 712–715; cf. 1161), would be enough to make a savage out of any man, even if he were not aggrieved by the cruel treatment he had received at the hands of treacherous former comrades (cf. 268–284). The play indeed makes several allusions to savagery, including Philoctetes' appearance (226), the beasts and birds hunted by him as the only available means of sustenance (165–166, 287–289, 710–711, 1107–1109), the sea (1455), the disease (173, 226, 265–266, 313, 693–694), and Philoctetes' misanthropic refusal to consider friendly counsel (1321).³ There is no indication that the hero, a noble man and current owner of Heracles' bow, has turned into a delusional savage. Nonetheless, the play questions his former comrades' decision to abandon him, and can explore the grievous

Alcibiades' return from exile. For non-allegorical political readings, see Tessitore (2003); Biancalana (2005); Hawthorne (2006). For a cautious approach to the political interpretation of plays, see Griffin (1999a) and Heath (2006).

² There are scattered mentions of Philoctetes and episodes of his career in *Iliad* (2.716–725) and *Odyssey* (3.188–190, 6.219). The story of the hero was narrated more fully in *Cypria* and *Little Iliad*, summarized in Proclus (38, 41, 74 Bernabé). Aeschylus and Euripides had treated the story in now lost *Philoctetes* plays (249–257 Radt and 787–803 Kannicht respectively). Euripides' play was produced in 431 BC, together with *Medea* and *Dictys*. Valuable information on the three tragedians' handling of the myth of Philoctetes is provided by Dio Chrysostom (52 and 59); see Mueller (1997). For an overview of the background of Sophocles' play, see Webster (1970) 2–5; Kamerbeek (1980) 1–6; Ussher (2001) 11. Cf. n6 below.

³ Segal (1995) 98, 114 discusses the contrast between civilization and savagery in the play.

consequences of isolation more extensively than plays dramatizing versions of the story in which Lemnos was inhabited.

In *Philoctetes*, the victim's embittered hatred of his callous enemies was bound to grow and harden significantly over the long years of his isolation.⁴ Philoctetes would now never collaborate with them, or even talk to them, but simply kill them on sight (103–107; cf. 46–47, 75–76). The remoteness of the island has also strengthened Philoctetes' power of endurance in the face of terrible hardships, a point of considerable pride for an ailing man (533–538; cf. 285–297, 1110).⁵ On the other hand, it has fostered his desire to escape his isolation and return home to Malis to his father and friends (310–313, 468–472, 663–666, 1212–1217). This mixture of strength and vulnerability has been correctly recognized and assessed by the senior envoy, Odysseus, before the play begins. As becomes obvious from a very early statement of his, he has devised a clever plan (σέφισμα, 14) with which he hopes to trap Philoctetes shortly (13–14). It will appear soon that the execution of the stratagem hinges crucially on the collaboration of his junior partner, Neoptolemus: he will be instructed to pretend that he has called on Lemnos on his way home to Skyros from Troy, having quarrelled with Odysseus and the Atreids because they cheated him of his father's arms (54–69). This false story is meant to establish Philoctetes' goodwill toward Neoptolemus, an alleged enemy of his arch-enemies (cf. 389–390, 403–409), and enhance his eagerness to sail with him, supposedly for home but actually for Troy.

2. *Neoptolemus: Yearning and Uncertainty*

The plausibility, indeed ingenuity, of this crafty plan, which exploits both aspects of the psychology of a deserted man such as Philoctetes, is beyond question. Since its execution requires the collaboration of young Neoptolemus, it provides an excellent justification for the second major mythic innovation in the play. This of course was not the only reason why Sophocles chose to enrich his cast with Neoptolemus. His character considerably broadened the scope of the play's literary and moral explorations. By virtue of his ancestry, Neoptolemus provides a direct link to the deceased champion Achilles and the epic values of honour, honesty, and glory he

⁴ See Winnington-Ingram (1980) 290–292, 297.

⁵ Clarke Kosak (2006) argues that Philoctetes constructs a model of inner nobility based on his endurance of hardships. For Philoctetes' disease, see also Worman (2000).

represents, or at least is said in the play to have represented in his lifetime (904–905, 1284, 1310–1313). Initially at least, this legacy distances the young man from Odysseus' aims and, especially from his methods (86–95, 100, 108, 110) and is bound to associate him with Philoctetes, who presents himself as an example of heroic or Achillean integrity in the play.⁶

Nevertheless, Neoptolemus soon abandons his objections to Odysseus' plan and agrees to co-operate in the deception of Philoctetes (120). This first prevarication and shift of allegiance will be followed by several others until the very end of the play, when Heracles will appear *ex machina* to send Philoctetes and Neoptolemus to Troy (1409–1443), after they have finally agreed to sail to Greece (1402–1408). Most dramatic among these shifts are Neoptolemus' revelation of the ruse (915–916) and the return of the bow (1287–1292) to Philoctetes. Famously, the dramatization of the youth's moral education is one of the play's most fascinating aspects. Neoptolemus' tortuous journey toward the fulfilment of his destiny takes place amid competing claims to his allegiance and narratives of nobility, duty, and glory. These narratives bring out the intellectual, moral, and rhetorical strengths and weaknesses of the two senior men, Odysseus and Philoctetes.

Scholars often suggest that Neoptolemus shifts his allegiance from father figure to father figure in the play⁷ but this glosses over a crucial component of Neoptolemus' presentation. The youth's primary and unwavering allegiance is to his father Achilles, much as the role model of the eponymous hero in *Ajax* is his father Telamon. A boy who grew up with a yearning for an absent father he never met (cf. 350–351), Neoptolemus, on the verge of manhood, learned from his father's comrades that he was destined to fulfil his father's destiny and capture Troy (343–347; cf. 356–358). As is obvious from the prologue and from the tale he tells Philoctetes, he left Skyros with a romantic idea of glory and a notion of his father's integrity, which will eventually turn out to be rather vague. No difficult choices, no moral dilemma, no ethical controversy complicated his departure. Very soon, a wedge was to be driven between the two parts of Achilles' legacy, honesty and glory. Unlike Ajax, who faces a crisis but knows immediately what to do, and what Telamon would want him to do (*Aj.* 460–480), Neoptolemus does not know how to reconcile the demands of Achilles' moral excellence with the pursuit

⁶ For the play's relationship to the Homeric epics, see Beye (1970); Perisynakis (1992); Davidson (1995); Whitby (1996); Roisman (1997); Schein (2006).

⁷ See the bibliography cited in Schein (2006) 130n4, and add e.g. King (1987) 77, Blundell (1989a) 184, 211, (1989b), and Clarke Kosak (2006) 51. Schein argues that the play's presentation of all principal characters combines Iliadic and Odyssean elements.

of glory. This dire perplexity, most movingly expressed in his anxious exclamation at 969–970, is the result of his ignorance of, and inability to imagine, the way his father would have acted in a similar situation, in other words to figure out the moral limits imposed by the cherished, but hazily understood, paternal legacy.

It may be important that Neoptolemus never mentions Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon, nor his disgusted withdrawal from the war.⁸ Achilles' choices in this difficult crisis could certainly serve as guiding examples for his son's behaviour. The failure to mention the quarrel may imply, then, that Neoptolemus had no clear knowledge of events that took place in the Greek camp before his recruitment. Nor does he mention the judgment of arms, or the suicide of Ajax, and says that he has heard that Achilles was shot by Apollo (334–335) and that Thersites is alive (445)—according to *Aethiopis* (69 Bernabé) Achilles had been shot by Paris and Apollo, and Thersites had been killed by Achilles (68 Bernabé). While these omissions and claims may not indicate real ignorance of events, Neoptolemus' comment that Ajax' survival would have guaranteed the bestowal of his father's arms on him (412–413) shows that his knowledge of the dynamics of power in the Greek camp is far from solid.⁹ What guarantee does Neoptolemus have that Ajax would manage, or even want, to have the arms delivered to Achilles' son?

The plausibility of an implicit suggestion, especially when it involves a poet's handling of mythic material and a deceptive role-within-a-role, is always very difficult to assess. Nevertheless, it should at least be acknowledged that there is no reason to take Neoptolemus' knowledge of the events in question for granted. The epic tradition cannot be used as a guide to a tragedian's choices, and Neoptolemus' answers to Philoctetes' questions have not been dictated by Odysseus. In any case, since Neoptolemus does not turn to his father's old quarrel for guidance in his present dilemma,

⁸ No other character does, either. The isolated Philoctetes may easily be assumed to be ignorant of it. For Odysseus' failure to invoke the past in his attempt to win over Neoptolemus, especially after the revelation of the deception, see the discussion in the next section.

⁹ The comment does not contribute to Philoctetes' deception, which has been completed before the interrogation. There is also no reason to imagine that Neoptolemus' replies are meant to enhance Philoctetes' aversion to rejoining the campaign when all the noble men are dead and the bad thrive; cf. Winnington-Ingram (1980) 340–341, and Roberts (1989) 169–170. Philoctetes' attitude toward the campaign has been formed long ago and has nothing to do with the identity of the war casualties. The ruse was conceived precisely because he would never willingly rejoin the campaign.

his knowledge of that quarrel, even if taken for granted, is tantamount to ignorance. Into this informational and moral vacuum step the two senior men, Odysseus and Philoctetes, who try to flesh out how Neoptolemus should go about fulfilling his glorious destiny, or emulating Achilles' excellence, in ways that suit them. The son's access to the legacy of his great father is mediated through the narratives of his father's comrades, as he himself points out in his first reference to Achilles (89), and especially the narratives of Philoctetes. Unsurprisingly, the senior men's battle for the younger man's soul involves several choices to either stress or gloss over various chunks of the past, resulting in significant ambiguities.

3. *The Father and Surrogates: Achilles, Philoctetes, and Friends*

In contrast to Odysseus, who never invokes Achilles' legacy, Philoctetes, a much more sympathetic and intriguing figure than his enemy, refers to it often (874–876, 904–905, 940, 1283–1284, 1310–1313; cf. 242, 260, 1066–1067). This is probably the main reason why he finally succeeds in persuading Neoptolemus to do his bidding, despite the great sacrifice this entails for the youth. The crucial difference between the two senior figures is not to be located in their narratives of glory, or even in their moral code. The importance of the latter notwithstanding, Odysseus serves a common and divinely sanctioned goal (66–67, 989–990, 997–998, 1140–1145, 1226, 1243, 1257–1258, 1293–1294). He also gains no personal benefit from its fulfilment, beyond glory. Odysseus' moral standing is compromised by his claims of moral relativism (82–85, 1049–1052). Although he is not the only character concerned with gain (cf. 112, 514, 926), he extols the willingness to bend morality for the sake of victory and profit (81–82, 109, 111), which brings him close to late fifth-century sophistry and demagoguery.¹⁰

This dubious rhetorical choice is perhaps the most trenchant example of the complicated correspondence, or lack thereof, between word and action, a major theme in the play. In a piece of searing irony, both intertextual and intratextual, the master plotter, the devotee of the tongue (cf. 96–99), as it were, is not particularly adept at constructing and executing plausible

¹⁰ According to Gardiner (1987) 48–49, Odysseus is presented as a typical fifth-century demagogue, who controls the people, represented by the Chorus of Neoptolemus' men. Cf. Blundell (1987) 321, 329. For Odysseus' affiliations with the sophists, see also e.g. Knox (1964) 124–125; Rose (1976) 81, 90; Craik (1980). For the Chorus, who do not imitate or follow Odysseus, see the discussion at the end of section 5 below.

plots, or at using rhetoric to manipulate others for his purposes. As already suggested, in contrast to Philoctetes, Odysseus fails to ground his promises of glory to Neoptolemus in Achilles' values and behaviour. He offers no narrative that would present Neoptolemus' mission to Lemnos as worthy of Achilles or compatible with his values. On the contrary, he admits in the prologue that the ruse he is asking Neoptolemus to practice violates justice and the youth's noble principles (79–85), which Neoptolemus considers as the essence of his father's legacy (86–91). Moreover, and perhaps more crucially, Odysseus conspicuously and disastrously fails to construct any sort of counter-narrative to answer Philoctetes' accusations concerning his abandonment (1047–1048).

Despite this asymmetry between the two senior men, both encourage him to put aside his past commitments and acquiesce in their plans (81–85, 1368–1369, 1400–1401) by promising him glory (117–120, 477–479, 1370–1372). They also adopt each other's methods in their attempt to persuade Neoptolemus: Odysseus appeals to justice (1247–1248; cf. 1253), and Philoctetes is willing to massage the facts in his invocations of the oath Neoptolemus supposedly swore to take him to Malis (941, 1367–1368, 1398–1399). Another major, and probably the most important, compromising aspect in Philoctetes' view of his plight, and in the narrative of glory he presents to Neoptolemus, is the division of his comrades into absolute villains, mainly the Atreids and Odysseus, and impeccable paragons of nobility, mainly Achilles. Philoctetes firmly believes that his abandonment was morally culpable, and views the ritual considerations Odysseus invokes to justify it (8–11) as a mere cover for the real reason, the physical discomfort his proximity caused to his insensitive comrades (872–876, 1031–1033; cf. 473–474, 482–483, 890–892).

If the abandonment was a common decision, the other leaders, whom Philoctetes esteems and whose loss he laments in his conversation with Neoptolemus (410–452), shared part of the responsibility. Indeed, the army as a whole can hardly be exonerated: there is no indication that any of the men Philoctetes views as honourable opposed or begrudged the decision to abandon him, or that the army hierarchy was rigid enough to ensure conformity with the commanders' decisions. Alternatively, if responsibility for the abandonment rests only with the Atreids, as Odysseus suggests in the prologue (6), then the victim's mortal hatred of Odysseus becomes inexplicable. Philoctetes' skewed view of his comrades indicates cognitive and moral myopia, casting a long shadow on his stance in the play, especially on his view of the past. The apparent failure of Achilles, and the other supposedly noble leaders, to oppose Philoctetes' abandonment also of course

complicates Neoptolemus' trust in his father's excellence. Neoptolemus, however, knows his father only through the narratives of others, so his failure to understand is less troubling.

In *Philoctetes*, then, Odysseus seems not only ruthless and crafty but also incapable of living up to his Homeric reputation as a master of persuasive speech. On the other hand, he does not carry as great a part of responsibility for Philoctetes' abandonment as the victim thinks, and he is on the side of right, or at least on the side of the gods (cf. 989–990). In a remarkable reversal, after the return of the bow, the continued intransigence of the victimized Philoctetes seems to compromise his integrity and even his piety. This intransigence makes him not only disregard Helenus' prophecy, but also deprive his new friend Neoptolemus of the opportunity to win the glory he covets. What is more problematic, both morally and factually, Philoctetes wishes to convince Neoptolemus not simply to sail to Troy without him but to sail to Greece with him. After the youth has proven that he is noble like his father and Philoctetes, the latter must, according to his principles, reciprocate the favour and go to Troy, especially since he would benefit greatly from his agreement to do so. Although his deception of Philoctetes forces Neoptolemus to reject one part of Achilles' legacy, honesty, in favour of the other part, glory, his disclosure of the ruse and return of the bow enable him to emulate both parts of the paternal legacy.

4. *The Arms of Achilles: Another Judgment*

Philoctetes cannot continue rejecting the option of sailing for Troy without appearing selfish, to the point of immorality or self-contradiction. He now needs to find an argument that may present Neoptolemus' return to Troy as a morally compromise, at least according to his principles, which Neoptolemus demonstrably shares. Otherwise, Philoctetes' enemies would enjoy a clear advantage in promoting their claim to Neoptolemus' allegiance, as the vision of glory they offered would be morally unobjectionable and more rewarding. Since Sophocles apparently did not wish to put Philoctetes at a moral or rhetorical disadvantage, he has the hero come up with a powerful argument. As is expected for a man so preoccupied with the past, Philoctetes turns to the past for the crucial argument that may convince Neoptolemus. Unable to continue arguing from his own experiences, or from Achilles' Trojan career, of which he is presumably ignorant, Philoctetes turns to Neoptolemus' past. It is indicative of Sophocles' intricate handling of the tradition that this all-important argument hinges on

one of the play's most intriguing ambiguities, the delivery of Achilles' arms to Neoptolemus.¹¹

Philoctetes claims that Neoptolemus' return to Troy and his alliance with the hated Atreids and Odysseus is disgraceful because the trio had insulted Achilles' son by cheating him of his father's arms (1362–1372). A noble man never forgets an insult and never forgives an enemy, not only because of the inextinguishable bitterness generated by past wrongs but also because the past is the only sure guide to the future (1358–1361). The problem with the validity of this argument is obvious: the non-delivery of the arms to Neoptolemus is mentioned twice before Philoctetes' speech, but both times in the context of Neoptolemus' deception of Philoctetes (62–64, 360–384). In *Little Iliad* (74 Bernabé) the arms were duly delivered to Neoptolemus upon his arrival at Troy, and Sophocles may be thought to have tacitly followed this tradition. If Philoctetes continues to operate under an illusion, and Neoptolemus does not care to enlighten him, then Philoctetes stands little chance of convincing Neoptolemus. It is, then, surprising that Neoptolemus calls Philoctetes' speech 'plausible' (1373) and very soon agrees to take him home to Malis (1402). To be sure, this does not constitute evidence, let alone proof, that the arms have not been delivered to Neoptolemus. Apart from the epic tradition, and the mention of the non-delivery only in the context of the deception tale, Neoptolemus nowhere indicates that he harbours a grudge against Odysseus or the Atreids. Nor does he relent as soon as Philoctetes mentions the arms.

On the other hand, the tradition can be of no help in solving the problem. Neoptolemus' deceptive tale famously contains a mixture of truths, half-truths, and falsehoods, and the fate of the arms does not self-evidently belong to the last category. A similar mixture informs Odysseus' instructions to Neoptolemus in the prologue. The only element that Odysseus designates as true in Neoptolemus's tale is the youth's paternity (56–57). The story of Neoptolemus' recruitment (60–61) is not sign-posted as true, but nobody has ever raised doubts about its truth. The only certainly fictitious element in Neoptolemus' tale is his abandonment of the expedition because the Atreids failed to deliver his father's arms to him. Moreover, Neoptolemus narrates the alleged dispute with the Atreids and Odysseus in very vivid terms. This may indicate his propensity for deception and aptitude for learning the lessons of evil instructors (cf. 971–972, 1007–1015) but it may also be a sign that he narrates an emotional part of his personal history.

¹¹ See the discussion of Machin (1981) 74–81, and cf. Ringer (1998) 109–111.

In the *exodos*, Neoptolemus finally capitulates after a discussion of the appropriate behaviour toward friends and enemies (1383–1392), and when Philoctetes urges him not to think of Troy anymore (1400–1401). This is a reiteration of his earlier admonition to Neoptolemus to repudiate any association with the dishonourable Atreids (1368–1372).

In light of these considerations, the non-delivery of the arms is not necessarily fictitious.¹² The play's failure to resolve this crucial ambiguity ensures that the audience will not immediately condemn either Odysseus or Philoctetes of immoral selfishness toward Neoptolemus. The latter's decision to comply with Philoctetes' wishes also would not appear inexplicable, whether the arms were delivered to him or not. If they were not, Philoctetes' speech opens his eyes to the moral compromise involved in forgiving an insult. If they were, Philoctetes' attitude throughout the play and especially his last speech open Neoptolemus' eyes to accumulated moral deficits that one single just act cannot counterbalance.

5. *Divine Words at the End and the Beginning: Heracles' Appearance and Helenus' Prophecy*

At this crucial juncture, Heracles appears as *deus ex machina*, the only such intervention in extant Sophoclean tragedy. His short speech (1409–1444) provides very little information—it is actually more of a *paraenesis* to a friend than a communication of new divine orders or predictions to mortals. Heracles' divine status and bond with Philoctetes are important but secondary factors in the success of his intervention. Heracles succeeds in persuading Philoctetes to sail to Troy not because he uses arguments that no other character has, or could have, used before but primarily because he presents an authoritative paradigm from his own heroic and noble past (1418–1422).¹³ This is bound to convince an addressee virtually fixated on the past and the moral values of noble heroic behaviour. I will return to the

¹² According to van Erp Taalman Kip (1996), who does not discuss *Philoctetes*, characters' claims should be taken at face value when no contradictory information is presented in the play. Since no character mentions the delivery of the arms to Neoptolemus, one should perhaps trust Philoctetes, as Neoptolemus does not reject his claim.

¹³ Heracles' speech is designated as *mythoi* (1410, 1417, 1447), an authoritative discourse, which may be meant to contrast with the *logoi* used by the other characters. See Rabel (1997) and Hawthorne (2006), who quote the discussion of *mythos* in Martin (1989) esp. 1–42. Heracles' emphasis on the past is crucial but it is not true that no other character, primarily Odysseus, could have made such an appeal.

construction of Heracles' narrative and Philoctetes' response to it in the next section. For now, Heracles' intervention prohibits the materialization of the so-called first ending of the play in a manner that has been deemed jarring, or shocking.¹⁴

On this reading, Sophocles constructed a rich plot, full of intrigues, surprises, and even plots-within-the-plot and roles-within-roles. This masterly drama contrived to present as the only morally satisfying conclusion one of the most radical breaks with the mythic tradition, the departure of Philoctetes and Neoptolemus for Greece. Heracles' intervention does not erase the preceding moral struggle and does not include adequate compensation for the shame and suffering the speaker's admonitions entail. The execution of the master deception, which Odysseus had devised before the dramatic time of the play, has been hindered not only by Neoptolemus but also, and earlier, by the master plotter himself, primarily through the dispatch of the so-called false merchant (542 ff.). Heracles, the last arrival and divine messenger of Zeus, manages to accomplish the execution of the threatened plot. The fact that Heracles' role is played by the third actor, who also played Odysseus and the false merchant, has been noted by several critics and viewed as metatheatrically significant.¹⁵

This plausible-sounding reading of the end of the play does not do full justice to Sophocles' design. A play with several grey areas and intractable dilemmas certainly does not present any course of action as the only honourable one. Besides, as already suggested, both Philoctetes and Odysseus try to manipulate Neoptolemus, and their methods are at times remarkably similar. The play's failure to elaborate on the divine background of Philoctetes' abandonment opens up the possibility that his dogged refusal to let go of the past is less nobly justified than he thinks, and may be partly attributed to his own construction of the past. The ambiguity surrounding the delivery of Achilles' arms to Neoptolemus, discussed above, is also important in this connection. There is, however, one crucial element in the

¹⁴ See Linforth (1956) 150–151; Waldock (1966) 206; Craik (1979) 19, 21; Ringer (1998) 121–124. For a list of more positive views of Heracles' appearance, see Hamilton (1975) 135n17; cf. also Falkner (1998) 47, 55, and Tessitore (2003) 85–88.

¹⁵ See Falkner (1998) 47n80, who argues that the identity of the actor links the authorial functions of Odysseus and Heracles, and Ringer (1998) 122. This is one of the reasons that led Lattimore (1964) 92n35 to endorse the suggestion of Errandonea (1956) that Heracles is Odysseus in disguise. Cf. Shucard (1974). This has been rejected by virtually all subsequent critics, with good reason. Still, Odysseus and Heracles are quite closely affiliated; cf. Tessitore (2003) 86.

play which is fairly unambiguous but whose implications are never seriously examined by the three mortal principals or the Chorus. This is the prophecy of Helenus, the motivation for the events dramatized in the play, and the divine will it articulates. This association problematizes the actions and reactions of the characters, and especially the supposed nobility of the decision taken in the so-called first ending versus the moral compromise allegedly enforced by the second.

Since the prophecy is not quoted or reported by any impartial and/or authoritative figure, it is not surprising that it has given rise to interpretive debates and occasional confusion.¹⁶ The prophecy is mentioned or reported in the context of the deception of Philoctetes, and in the attempt at damage control, after Neoptolemus has revealed the ploy to the victim. Already the prologue may contain allusions to the prophecy (68–69, 114–115), and its outline and the characters' knowledge of it do not seem to be in doubt.¹⁷ Despite what Tycho von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and his followers think, Sophocles has provided a fairly consistent account,¹⁸ although not at one place in the play and certainly not early on. He did not, as he did not have to, reveal the prophecy in the prologue but this generates no unresolved ambiguities or contradictions. According to Neoptolemus, who provides the fullest report, the prophecy said that the Achaean army would capture Troy only if Philoctetes with his bow and Neoptolemus joined the fight for the city (1329–1339). Philoctetes should go to Troy willingly (1332); his wound would be healed by the sons of Asclepius, and Troy would fall before the end of the summer (1329–1334). According to the false merchant, the Achaeans needed to talk Philoctetes into leaving Lemnos (612–613).

To be sure, the false merchant cannot necessarily be trusted.¹⁹ Nevertheless, since an invented persuasion clause in the prophecy serves no conceivable dramatic purpose, the clause may be deemed to be genuine. On the other hand, and much more significantly, the false merchant's report does

¹⁶ For references, see Segal (1995) 241n22 and Kittmer (1995) 27n60. See also Visser (1998) 22–37 and Budelmann (2000a) 109–130.

¹⁷ The view of those such as Bowra (1944) 261–306, who have argued that Odysseus ignores, or disastrously misinterprets, the prophecy, finds no support in the text. Cf. Thummer (1981) 1–2 and Buxton (1982) 130. Visser (1998) tries to draw a distinction between the wording and the spirit of the oracle (cf. Gill 1980, 140–142) but such distinction is artificial, and its presence cannot be supported by any piece of evidence in the play. For Neoptolemus' knowledge of the prophecy in the prologue, see the discussion below.

¹⁸ Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1917) 304; cf. Robinson (1969) 45–51 and Machin (1981) 61–103.

¹⁹ Cf. Winnington-Ingram (1980) 292 and Lefèvre (2001) 211.

not indicate that Philoctetes had to be persuaded through a frank discussion and open debate.²⁰ Also, it is perhaps important that the false merchant does not explicitly say that the Achaeans had to talk Philoctetes into sailing to Troy but into leaving Lemnos. If this reproduces Helenus' wording, the prophecy left open a window for the use of deception. Even if it does not, it is obvious from the prologue, and from Philoctetes' intransigence throughout the play, that honesty would never work with him. However vague, obscure, or difficult to fulfil, tragic prophecies and oracles never ask people to do the impossible, and tragic gods, their amorality or indifference to human concerns notwithstanding, never ask mortals to engage in suicide missions. Deception was the only possible interpretation of Helenus' prophecy, and the only means of fulfilling it. Whether or not Odysseus in the assembly of the army genuinely mooted the possibility of using violence to take Philoctetes to Troy, as the false merchant says (618), violence was Odysseus' last resort. If 1332 reproduces the prophecy and is not Neoptolemus' addition, inspired by the developments after the revelation of the ruse, it does not exclude the initial possibility of using deception.

Another problem is that Odysseus' emphasis on the bow in the prologue (68, 77–78, 113, 115) seems to contradict the precept of the prophecy concerning Philoctetes. Odysseus' willingness not only to use violence (983, 985; cf. 1296–1298) but also to leave only with the bow (1055–1062), after Neoptolemus has disclosed the ruse, also seems to be in violation of the prophecy. The indifference of the leader of the mission toward the stipulations of the prophecy has been viewed as indicative of his moral bankruptcy and opportunistic ruthlessness. But this judgment is based on largely false impressions. There is no sign that the bow alone would be enough for the fulfilment of the prophecy, and the initial stratagem does not aim only at securing possession of the weapon. If only the bow were necessary, then Neoptolemus and his men would simply have to wait until Philoctetes fell asleep and snatch it, or otherwise ambush him and steal the bow. Besides, Neoptolemus shows no concern to seize the bow in his deception of Philoctetes. In the prologue, Sophocles may have left a margin of ambiguity concerning the necessity of bringing Philoctetes along with the bow to Troy for dramatic reasons. Odysseus' early emphasis on the bow may be accounted for by the need to impress on Neoptolemus the wondrous nature of the weapon, including its lethality: the invalid but intransigent owner of this marvel cannot be approached or captured by honest means,

²⁰ Cf. e.g. Linforth (1956) 115; Garvie (1972) 218n16; Gellie (1972) 144.

and his presence at Troy necessitates the moral compromises the youth is being asked to make.

Odysseus' claim that the bow alone without Philoctetes is enough because other able archers such as Teucer or Odysseus himself can wield it (1055–1062) may well be a ruse to convince Philoctetes. Tellingly, Odysseus stresses not the certainty of starvation that faces Philoctetes but the prospect that his weapon will glorify Odysseus himself. This is probably meant to arouse Philoctetes' sense of revulsion at the potentiality of his enemy's winning glory with his prize and at his expense. It may also not be accidental or insignificant that Odysseus does not object to the Chorus staying behind during the preparations for departure, possibly in the hope that Philoctetes will change his mind at the last moment (cf. 1078–1079). Even if Odysseus' claim is not a bluff, he comes up with it only under the terrible pressure of Neoptolemus' initiative. Odysseus apparently modifies his plan for the sake of damage control, as it were. In his eyes, it is apparently better to return to Troy with something than with nothing.

This, though, does not indicate that the initial plan was conceived with the bow, only or primarily, in mind, or that Odysseus did not care for the dictates of the prophecy. His last words in the play, uttered when Neoptolemus has just handed back the bow to its owner, are a threat to take Philoctetes and not the bow only to Troy by force (1297–1298). Apart from the importance of Philoctetes' dispatch to Troy that this threat reveals, it is also the last indisputable deviation from the prophecy. Nevertheless, the threat is never carried out. Force is actually used only to stop Philoctetes from committing suicide (1003), another telling intervention. More importantly, Odysseus never uses violence casually, or arbitrarily, but plans, or threatens, to do so only as the very last resort. This is to be expected, given Philoctetes' possession of the bow and Odysseus' pragmatic nature. It is indicative that Philoctetes ignores Odysseus' threat of violence after the merchant's report. In any case, Odysseus' preferred method of achieving his ends is the use of suitable words.

Although the issue of Neoptolemus' knowledge of the prophecy is unlikely to be easily settled, the least problematic assumption is that he knows it already in the prologue. Otherwise, his trust in the false merchant's report of the persuasion clause, and especially his full report of the prophecy at the end, with addition of details he has not heard in the dramatic time of the play, become quite difficult to explain. It would be a bold interpreter who would be willing to saddle Sophocles with such inconsistency without being able to point out a major and convincing dramatic advantage that would result from it. Although, according to the epic tradition, Helenus'

prophecy preceded Neoptolemus' arrival at Troy, the play does not indicate explicitly that it follows this version of events, or that the prophecy was not repeated in Neoptolemus' presence. Those who think that Neoptolemus is ignorant of the prophecy in the prologue base their argument on his two questions to Odysseus at 112 and 114. At 112, he asks what he will gain from Philoctetes' coming to Troy. If this proves ignorance of the prophecy, then it also, and much more glaringly, proves ignorance of Odysseus' statement at 68–69 (cf. 77–78), which clearly indicated that Neoptolemus could not capture Troy without first securing the bow of Philoctetes.

Since it is absurd to assume that Neoptolemus does not recall the statement at 68–69, 112 does not prove his ignorance of the prophecy. At 113 Odysseus patiently repeats that only Philoctetes' bow will capture Troy. Although Odysseus' answer is not obscure or misleading, his focus on the bow may explain why at 114 Neoptolemus seeks a confirmation of the promise that he would be the sacker of Troy. But it is more plausible that both 112 and 114 are not questions posed by someone ignorant of crucial information but the last thrashings of a man desperately struggling against a force that is exhausting his defences. Nor is Neoptolemus' willingness to use violence to capture Philoctetes (90–92) a sign that he has no idea of the prophecy. Neoptolemus responds to the suggestion of Odysseus, who stressed from the beginning that Philoctetes had to be captured. Neoptolemus' reaction is presented as the instinctive aversion of a young nobleman to guile and his equally instinctive preference for fighting. He will later mention persuasion too (102), in another desperate attempt to prevail on Odysseus. Besides, only once does Neoptolemus indicate that the prophecy limits his choices or decisions (839–842).

In view of the above, the will of the gods as revealed in the prophecy was for Philoctetes to go to Troy and capture it with Neoptolemus. Despite their concern with piety and noble behaviour, neither man worries at all that their plan to return to Greece may fail, or ruin their lives, because it may offend the gods. They never ask for divine guidance or assistance in their enterprise. Philoctetes of course does not believe Odysseus when the latter claims to be the servant of Zeus. On the other hand, he has no reason to distrust Neoptolemus, and never disputes the existence or truth of Helenus' prophecy. He certainly believes that there was a divine stimulus, presumably the prophecy that led his enemies to Lemnos (1037–1039). Nevertheless, he does not see that this also decrees his own departure for Troy but views it as the gods' way of punishing his enemies. Neoptolemus, who is apparently aware of the prophecy from the beginning, and does not question its import, is browbeaten by Philoctetes to abandon the expedition. If one of

the two endings of the play is bound to strike the audience as shocking, and this is a big if, then the first is much likelier to do so than the second.

This is not to deny that the play touches on several issues that make the second ending, if not morally dubious, at least not self-evidently and satisfyingly acceptable to the audience. As argued above, neither Odysseus nor Philoctetes has been presented as a paragon of moral excellence, and certainly not as being above the pursuit of benefit, even with dubious means. For his part, whether he chooses to sail to Troy or to Greece, Neoptolemus has to put aside moral principles and resulting commitments. The two senior men try to persuade him to do their bidding with promises of glory but their narratives are morally ambivalent. What is equally, and perhaps more, disconcerting, the Chorus had advised Neoptolemus to abandon the incapacitated Philoctetes and decamp with the bow (833–838, 843–864). Put in the mouth of reasonably compassionate men, serving soldiers, and dedicated followers of Neoptolemus, this most outrageous suggestion, which defies the orders of both god and leader, cannot be glossed over lightly. Especially since the Chorus members represent their colleagues at Troy, the silent majority of the army, their lack of moral moorings reflects on the entire army. Can the cause of such men, and such leaders as the Atreids, be noble, and do they deserve divine support and success?

These are legitimate questions, and it is likely that the poet wished for his audience to ponder them. However, the Trojan campaign is never directly questioned in the play, and the glossing over of the background of Philoctetes' abandonment on Lemnos saves the Atreids and Odysseus as well as the other leaders from moral infamy. But *Philoctetes* is hardly an optimistic play. Even though no character, with the possible and partial exception of the Chorus, is immoral, the prospect of moral compromise always looms large, especially if Heracles' last injunction is taken to allude to Neoptolemus' and his comrades' future show of impiety at Troy (1440–1441). Mortals, even élite and gifted individuals who strive for noble self-fulfilment, are hobbled by their limited understanding. They fail to respect divine mandates and to control their emotions, which distort their view of themselves and others.

6. *Divine Words at the End: Narrative and Audience*

Heracles' appearance snatches salvation from the jaws of destruction, and piety from the jaws of disregard for divine will, but for some time only, probably until the capture of Troy. Piety, significantly couched in terms

reminiscent of epic glory (1443–1444),²¹ is exalted as the ultimate model of virtue to which every nobleman, the young Neoptolemus as well as his elders, should aspire. Nevertheless, it may not be accidental that salvation has been associated with lying in the prologue (109), and Neoptolemus presented the Atreids as Philoctetes' saviours in his last attempt to persuade him to sail to Troy (1391; cf. 1378–1379). In this light, the second ending is not problematized because it annuls an honourable first but rather because it replicates many of the ambiguities that led to the first.²² I indicated above that Heracles succeeds where everybody else failed because he offers a paradigm of past heroic behaviour, which Philoctetes, a man fixated on the past, is bound to wish to emulate. But the shine of this façade of heroic nobility and piety cannot swamp the grey areas that surround Heracles' narrative. These are not the lack of a theodicy, the absence of explanations, and the frustrated expectation for some justification of human suffering, which many critics have correctly noted.²³ Prominent though these features are, they are far from extraordinary: to various degrees, all tragic gods, whether they appear onstage or not, share this reticence, or indifference for human concerns. What distinguishes Heracles' speech from other divine utterances is rather its inclusion of a narrative, which is not only very short but also, and primarily, as defective as any other in the play.

According to this narrative, just as Heracles was compensated for his labours with the reward of immortal excellence (1419–1420), so Philoctetes will be rewarded with glory for his sufferings (1421–1422). Heracles also predicts that Philoctetes will kill Paris, 'who was the cause of these misfortunes' (ὅς τῶνδ' αἴτιος κακῶν ἔφϋ, 1426). The association between the labours of Heracles and Philoctetes is far from self-evident, and the asymmetry naturally extends to their rewards. According to the tradition, which may, with reasonable confidence, be assumed to stand, Heracles laboured because of Hera's hostility, and his labours benefited humanity. Philoctetes, on the other hand, suffered in isolation because he violated the precinct of Chryse. Religious offenses, even unwitting ones, are not rewarded with glory. Should it be assumed that Hera's jealousy and Chryse's anger are being equated? This is quite unlikely, and Philoctetes' sufferings, and even the second capture of Troy (1439–1440), cannot compare with Heracles' labours.

²¹ The authenticity of these lines has been unnecessarily suspected; see Lloyd-Jones/Wilson (1990) 212. For the text of 1443, see Cuny (2007) 189.

²² For the opposite view, see Falkner (1998) 47–56.

²³ See e.g. Reinhardt (1947³) 200; Segal (1981a) 355; Kirkwood (1994²) 432; Parker (1999) 13; Pucci (2003) 324.

The singling out of Paris as 'the cause of these misfortunes' is also nothing short of astonishing, especially since the misfortunes in question remain vague. Qualified by the demonstrative pronoun τῶνδε(ε), the misfortunes are unlikely to indicate the war. They are more likely to be Philoctetes' misfortunes but Paris was not responsible for them, and his punishment cannot be part of Philoctetes' reward. Even if the misfortunes point to the war, whose morality has not been questioned in the play, the singling out of Paris cannot be justified by any piece of evidence, from either the play or the mythic/literary tradition.

The most arresting aspect of Heracles' vague and casual remarks is their seemingly gratuitous inclusion in a part of the play and a speech which would work without them, or through more solid associations such as, for instance, the inferiority of Eurystheus and the Atreids to Heracles and Philoctetes respectively. Of course, as already suggested, Heracles is an immortalized hero and a divine messenger whose appetite for detailed explanations is limited at best. Nevertheless, it cannot be passed over lightly that Heracles succeeds because he uses an authoritative, and thus persuasive, paradigm in his speech. In a play with pronounced metatheatrical concerns, Sophocles has presented him as the last 'author': he manages to offer a successful revision of a 'script' that has been 'performed' in various unsuccessful versions since the prologue of the play. It is plausible that the paradoxical combination of Heracles' narrative deficiencies and rhetorical success is the final exploration of the possibility or ability to construct a plausible, or representationally 'accurate', narrative, and of the workings of audience response to narrative construction. Heracles does not succeed because his speech is narratively superior to its predecessors' in representing the past. Instead, Heracles persuades Philoctetes because his speech responds to and reinforces Philoctetes' own narrative of the past and his fixation on this construct. In other words, the success of the construction of a narrative seems to hinge not so much on its representational adequacy and internal consistency as on its feedback relationship with audience narratives, which are in turn in a feedback relationship with audience emotions, as has become repeatedly obvious in the play. If so, then Sophocles in *Philoctetes* problematizes not only the so-called second ending but also theatrical discourse as a whole.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

Jon Hesk

The action of *Oedipus at Colonus* begins with the arrival of Oedipus and his daughter Antigone at (what they guess to be) a sacred grove. They sit down to rest on a rock within its boundaries (1–20). This frail, destitute, and blind old man has clearly been relying on the support of his daughter for some time (22). We later learn that he was exiled from Thebes many years ago and has been wandering from place to place ever since. Antigone has never left his side.

Initially, father and daughter seem to know only that the city they can see in the distance is Athens (24–27). They (and perhaps the audience) are kept in suspense as to their precise location. Then, a local man arrives on the scene to tell them that they must leave the ground they are treading on (36–37), for the grove is sacred to the Eumenides and the entire area belongs to Poseidon (39–40, 53–55). He gestures to a statue—probably visible on-stage—of the horseman-hero who founded this town and gave it his name. (58–63). The man describes Colonus as the ‘bulwark of Athens’ (58).

On hearing all this, Oedipus refuses to move. He declares his status as a suppliant and demands that Attica’s king (Theseus) be sent for (38–80). Theseus will receive a great benefit in return for small assistance (72–74). While the man goes off to fetch the local elders, Oedipus reveals that the grove has momentous significance for him. The same oracle which predicted the ‘evils’ of parricide and incest for him also revealed that it was his destiny to end his ‘long-suffering life’ once he had reached a seat in a sanctuary of the Eumenides (84–110). As he prays to these divinities, Oedipus reveals that his death will bring advantage to those who have received him into their territory but will visit ruin upon those who sent him into exile (93–94).

The Chorus of Colonian elders now arrive with their entrance song (*parodos*). They insist that he move from sacred ground (117–169). Antigone painstakingly guides Oedipus to sit on another rock just outside the sanctuary (170–206). This distinctive combination of dialogue and stage action emphasizes the old man’s heavy reliance upon his daughter for advice and physical support. But it also shows that Oedipus’ appointed end will not

come about easily or immediately.¹ Almost as soon as he has sat down exactly where the oracle dictates, he is forced to move from that hallowed location. The Chorus now learn Oedipus' identity as he reluctantly yields to their questioning (207–224). They are shocked and horrified to have this notorious parricide and incest in their midst and they demand that he leave (226–236). Antigone makes a moving lyric appeal: they must show pity and recognize that Oedipus' actions were unwitting and inescapable (237–254). Oedipus argues for his moral innocence and appeals to Athens' reputation for compassion (258–291). The Chorus concede that they feel pity and they allow Oedipus to wait for Theseus (292–309).

Antigone's sister Ismene arrives from Thebes. Father and daughters embrace and exchange tender words (327–334). Oedipus expresses his extreme anger at his two sons (Eteocles and Polyneices) for not supporting him. His contrasting appreciation of the manner in which Antigone and Ismene have put his interests before theirs is marked (337–360). Ismene reports that Oedipus' sons are no longer content for Creon to rule Thebes and are quarrelling over the throne (361–420). Eteocles has driven his older brother into exile. Polyneices has acquired an alliance with Argos and plans to take control of the Theban throne by force of arms. Furthermore, the Delphic oracle has pronounced that Oedipus will one day be sought by the Theban people 'in death and in life for their preservation's sake' (390). In order to succeed in the coming war, Eteocles and Creon must settle Oedipus close to them and show due care and reverence to his tomb when he dies. Ismene warns that Creon will soon be on his way to persuade Oedipus away from Athens. Creon wants to control Oedipus' movements and give due offerings to Oedipus' tomb without incurring the pollution of having this parricide on Theban soil (402, 407). As with *Philoctetes* and *Ajax*, the question of who gets to control the protagonist's physical body is of central importance.²

When he learns that his sons were aware of these new oracles, Oedipus is furious. He curses his sons in the strongest terms and refuses to assist either of them (421–460). They did nothing to prevent his unwanted exile and in preference to their father, they chose 'thrones and sceptres and to be ruler over the land' (448–449). He calls upon the Chorus to aid the Eumenides in giving him protection in return for acquiring him as Athens' saviour (459–460). On the advice of the Chorus, Oedipus agrees to make ritual atonement to the Eumenides for trespassing upon their sacred ground. These rites

¹ See Budelmann (2000b).

² Hall (2010) 324.

will ensure that the goddesses protect 'the suppliant' (487). Ismene exits to perform these rites on behalf of her frail father on the other side of the grove.

Now Theseus arrives. Even before hearing his request, Theseus expresses sympathy and good will towards Oedipus. He points out that he too has known the sufferings of exile (551–568). Oedipus tells Theseus that if Attica protects him against his Theban enemies while he lives, and allows him to be buried in its soil when he dies, his tomb will give Athens great benefits, including the power to defeat Thebes in a future war (569–628). Theseus guarantees the old man his safety and burial on Athenian soil (631–649). Oedipus points out that 'men will come' to take him back to Thebes (653). Theseus reiterates that he will not allow this to happen (657–667). Having established that Oedipus wishes to remain in Colonus, Theseus exits. We learn later that he has gone to perform sacrifices at the nearby sanctuary of Poseidon (887–889).

At the moment when the king of Attica displays pity, piety, and a willingness to project his city's power to protect Oedipus and his daughters, the Chorus now welcome Oedipus via an ode which praises Colonus and its immediate environs. They also praise Attica ('this land of fine horses') and their 'mother city' of Athens (668–719). Athena and Poseidon are central to this rhetoric, especially the latter's association with horsemanship and seafaring (695–719). Indeed, this first *stasimon* presses a number of connections between the cultic, agricultural, and equestrian associations of the Colonian locale and the religion and founding myths of an Athenian state, which is subtly recognizable as the city of the play's audience in its fifth-century imperialist heyday.³ It is as if Theseus' arrival and decisive action have stirred the Chorus to express their Attic values and identity.

The joyous mood engendered by the Chorus' celebrations is short-lived. For the second episode heralds Creon's arrival with armed guards. He plans to take Oedipus back to the borders of Thebes and thereby ensure victory for Eteocles. But thanks to Ismene's earlier warnings, Creon's tactics of deception fail. The old man berates Creon for his reproaches and dishonesty (761–799). Creon now resorts to violence. He reveals that he has already had Ismene seized. His men kidnap Antigone and take her away before our very eyes (818–847). Amidst the Chorus' protests, Creon now threatens to seize Oedipus. To Creon's astonishment, Oedipus curses him 'to an old age that is like mine' (870).

³ See Kelly (2009) 93–96.

Theseus reappears onstage in the nick of time (887). There follows a heated exchange between the three men over the rights and wrongs of Creon's behaviour. In the face of Creon's reminder that Athens is harbouring an 'impure' parricide and an incest, Oedipus once again argues that these transgressions were unwitting and unintended (960–1013). He dwells on his killing of his father. It was a necessary act of self defence which Creon would himself have committed if he had been in the same position (991–999). Theseus then makes it clear that Creon will himself be detained in Attica unless the girls are handed back (1019–1035). Creon is thus forced into accompanying Theseus and his cavalry force on a mission to intercept the girls and their kidnappers.

In their second *stasimon*, the Chorus imagine the off-stage rescue mission and correctly predict its success (1044–1095). Ismene and Antigone are reunited with their father. Oedipus expresses his gratitude to Theseus and his country (1119–1138). Theseus agrees that he has made good on his promise to protect Oedipus and his daughter. He then notifies Oedipus that his son Polyneices has arrived in Colonus as a suppliant and seeks an audience with his father.

Oedipus initially refuses to receive Polyneices. Once again, then, the mood of celebration and joy is extinguished and Oedipus' outraged bitterness towards his own son comes to the fore. Theseus issues him with a reminder that it is a religious duty to accept suppliants (1179–1180). Oedipus is further persuaded by an intimate and subtle appeal from Antigone: Oedipus actually has an obligation to grant *her* wish that he should at least hear her brother out. He *must* show some compassion for his own kin. And he should not repeat the 'evil passion' displayed by his own parents towards him (1179–1203). Oedipus agrees to see his son once Theseus has reassured him that he will be safe from any attempt by Polyneices to gain control over his life (1204–1210).

The Chorus sing their third *stasimon* (1211–1248). It is a song full of darkness, unrelenting misery, and foreboding as they make general pronouncements about death, youth, and old age which clearly allude to Oedipus' tragic past and the grim future which (as the audience must suspect) will befall Polyneices, Eteocles, Antigone, and Creon.⁴ In their epode they turn their attention to Oedipus himself: he is like a storm-battered headland and 'grim waves of ruin' never cease from breaking over his head (1239–1248).

⁴ See Carey (2009).

Polyneices now arrives onstage and entreats his father to join his side in the conflict with his brother (1254–1279, 1284–1345). He regrets Oedipus' exile deeply and argues that he is only righting the wrongs which Eteocles has inflicted on him. He promises to restore his father to the royal palace. Polyneices cannot reclaim Thebes without his father's support. But Oedipus will have none of it and he brings down a curse on both sons: Polyneices and Eteocles will take each other's life and the Argive attack will fail (1370–1395). Polyneices leaves after refusing to heed Antigone's anguished pleas that he call off the invasion now that it has been doomed by their own father (1413–1446). He mirrors his father's intransigence as Antigone expresses her love for him through lamentation.

Peals of thunder and flashes of lightning signal to Oedipus that his end is near and that Zeus is orchestrating events (1514–1515). The old man explains that only Theseus is to witness the circumstances and exact location of his death. He must keep this secret to himself until he nears the end of his own life. Then he must reveal the information to his heir. Athens will only remain protected from a Theban threat if the secret is passed down from one king to the next in this way (1518–1538). Oedipus then leads Theseus and his daughters off-stage. In contrast to the frailty and physical reliance on Antigone he has displayed thus far, Oedipus guides the others unaided (1539–1555): this would have been an unexpected and miraculous spectacle for the audience. Oedipus says he feels himself guided by Hermes and Persephone towards his final resting place (1547–1548). There is a brief choral ode in which the Colonian elders pray allusively to the deities of the Underworld: may Oedipus be received painlessly into an untroubled afterlife (1556–1578).

A messenger now reports Oedipus' willing submission to a miraculous and mysterious death (1579–1666). He is able to tell us that Oedipus stopped at a 'brazen threshold' (1590), and sat down on a tomb between 'the Thorian rock and a hollow pear tree' (1595–1596). These lines make the significant dramatic point that Oedipus, now guided by a god, knows exactly where to place himself.⁵ Here, he bathed himself ritually with the aid of his daughters. As they wept in lamentation, he expressed his love for them in terms of compensation for the hardships they have endured (1611–1619). Then the voice of a god called upon Oedipus to delay no longer. Oedipus made Theseus and his daughters swear an oath of friendship. Theseus promised never willingly to do harm to the daughters. Oedipus also told his

⁵ Jebb (2004, orig. 1900) 247.

daughters that they must leave because it was not permitted for them to witness 'what may not be seen'—presumably the manner of his death and the location of his burial (1640–1644). We hear that everyone except Theseus withdrew: only the Athenian king knows *how* Oedipus died. One minute he was there and the next he was gone (1645–1666). All these details are associated with the special protective powers of a cult hero which Oedipus has clearly now acquired.

Ismene and Antigone re-enter and join the Chorus in a complex lyric exchange of lamentation known as a *kommós* (1670–1750). As they lament their father and their own troubles, the Chorus try to console them. Antigone then takes the lead in demanding that she and Ismene be allowed to see Oedipus' final resting place (1756–1757). Theseus cannot break the terms of his oath to Oedipus so he refuses her supplication (1760–1766). But he gives his blessing to Antigone's next request that she and her sister be allowed to return to Thebes so that they can try to prevent their brothers from killing each other (1768–1776). The play ends with the Chorus calling for the lamentations to cease, 'for in all ways these things stand fast' (1779). On one level the Chorus seem to be saying that Theseus will not go back on his promise to let the girls return to Thebes. But on another, more portentous level, they seem to be referring to the fixity of fate.⁶

This summary does scant justice to the play's likely theatrical impact when it was first performed at the City Dionysia of 402/1 BC. But it should at least serve to orientate this chapter's engagement with recent approaches to what is undoubtedly the least accessible and well-known of Sophocles' extant tragedies. Those approaches constitute a major rehabilitation: *Oedipus at Colonus* attracted many lukewarm appraisals in the first half of the twentieth century.⁷ It is still much less popular as a text for undergraduate study or for theatrical re-performance than the other two 'Theban' tragedies.⁸

Negative responses are perhaps understandable. On the page, the play can seem static and dull. Its episodes appear somewhat long and its characters' speeches are verbose. It is only when we imagine *Oedipus at Colonus*

⁶ See Jebb (2004, orig. 1900) 273.

⁷ Valuable examples of modern rehabilitation: Knox (1964) 143–164; Easterling (1967a), (1993b), (2006b); Burian (1974); Winnington-Ingram (1980) 248–279; Segal (1981a) 362–408; Slatkin (1986); Blundell (1989a) 226–259; Seaford (1994a) 130–139; Edmunds (1996); Markantonatos (2002), (2007); Kelly (2009). Criticisms of the play's quality and coherence: Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1917) 329–376; Bowra (1944) 309; Waldo (1951) 219–221.

⁸ For discussion and further bibliography on the play's 'reception', see Kelly (2009) 137–139.

as a live performance (full of fiery debates, desperate pleading, emotional sung laments, frantic entrances and exits) before a mass audience who were highly attuned to the conventions of Greek tragedy that the play reveals itself to be every bit as innovative, gripping, and theatrically startling as Sophocles' other plays or the output of Euripides.⁹

Even from my foregoing summary it should be clear that the play sustains tension and suspense despite Oedipus' early telegraphing of his cultic destiny. This is partly achieved through the introduction of a series of credible and dramatic threats to the fulfilment of that destiny. I have also tried to convey those moments of the play which were probably surprising to the audience's eyes and ears: the depth and detail of the play's evocation of local topography; the frequency and vehemence with which a Greek father curses his own sons; the miracle of Oedipus' unaided final walk to the sound of divine-sent thunder.

It is also important not to judge the play according to conceptions of the 'tragic' which are anachronistically narrow. Classical Greek audiences, especially those of the late fifth century, would not have expected all tragedies to contain the horrific revelations and heart-rending enactments of murder, self-mutilation, and suicide which we find in (say) *Oedipus Tyrannus* or *Medea*.¹⁰ As the great Sophoclean scholar Richard Jebb observed over a hundred years ago, *Oedipus at Colonus* represents 'a change from a severer type of tragedy ... more picturesque, more tolerant of a distributed interest, more meditative'.¹¹ We can couple this observation with Edith Hall's very recent and capacious working definition of Greek tragedy as 'the dramatic expression of an *inquiry* into suffering'.¹² *Oedipus at Colonus*' action and dialogue do indeed return again and again to the question of Oedipus' alleged culpability for his own and others' sufferings. It asks its audience to assess whether his angry curses and their terrible consequences are justified in the face of the harsh treatment meted out to him by his own kin. And it poses the question of whether all this past and future suffering is adequately explained or justified by Oedipus' miraculous death and transformation into a supernatural and talismanic being.

⁹ See now Hall (2010) 299–327.

¹⁰ See Allan (2008) 1–10.

¹¹ Jebb (1900, orig. 2004) xliii.

¹² Hall (2010) 6.

1. *Dating and Contemporary Resonances*

Sophocles probably died in 406/5 BC, although earlier and later dates are attested. According to its second hypothesis, *Oedipus at Colonus* was staged posthumously by Sophocles' grandson (also called Sophocles) at the City Dionysia in 402/1 BC (Radt T41). It won first prize. There is no record of which plays accompanied it. Some scholars have argued that *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* were revived alongside it to form a trilogy.¹³ It is worth noting, however, that the text of *Antigone* which we have is inconsistent with *Oedipus at Colonus* in one respect: in *Antigone*, Ismene describes how Oedipus died 'hated and ill-famed (*duskleês*)' (49–52). This hardly squares with his establishment as a cult hero in our play.

But when did Sophocles actually write *Oedipus at Colonus*? Its sophisticated plot, complicated three-way dialogues, and its displays of theatrical and musical experimentation have a certain kinship with *Electra* (413? BC) and *Philoctetes* (409 BC). Like those plays, *Oedipus at Colonus* is the outcome of a process of mutual influence between Sophocles and Euripides.¹⁴ But these features only allow us to guess that it was written in the last twenty years or so before Sophocles' death.

In order to derive a more precise date of composition, critics have mined *Oedipus at Colonus* for allusions to specific historical events. The play's setting in Colonus, a small town just over a mile north-west of Athens' Dipylon Gate, has been seen as significant here. It was Sophocles' native deme (Radt T18). The fact that the play depicts an old man dying in the vicinity of Sophocles' home town may tempt us towards autobiographical interpretation. Depending on what sources we believe, Sophocles survived into his seventies, eighties or nineties. The ancient biographical tradition clearly drew on *Oedipus at Colonus* to create stories of conflict between the aged playwright and his sons (Radt T1.50f, T81–84). The play certainly has interesting things to say about old age and generational conflict.¹⁵ However, the likelihood that Sophocles wrote the tragedy when he was old offers little help with dating or interpretation in and of itself.

Colonus was also the place where the oligarchic council of the 'Four Hundred' was voted into existence by an assembly of the Athenian people in 411 BC (Thuc. 8.67.2). The assembly was held in the town's sanctuary of Posei-

¹³ E.g. March (1987) 148–154; Müller (1996).

¹⁴ Rehm (2004) 32–33.

¹⁵ See Falkner (1995) 211–259.

don *Hippios* ('of horses'). Thucydides' wording suggests that Peisander and his fellow oligarchic conspirators deliberately chose this small, marginal sanctuary so that they could control the numbers of citizens attending, perhaps even terrorizing them into voting for the new constitutional proposals. The cult of Poseidon *Hippios* at Colonus was also closely associated with the Athenian *hippeis* (cavalry).¹⁶ The *hippeis* were dominated by wealthy aristocrats, many of whom would have supported Peisander's oligarchic proposals of 411 BC.

It may be no coincidence, then, that Colonus' sanctuary to Poseidon *Hippios* and this god's equestrian aspect are a constant and prominent point of reference in *Oedipus at Colonus* (54–55, 711–715, 887–900, 1491–1495, 1156–1159). And it is notable that it is mounted units from a town founded by a horseman who rescue Oedipus' daughters (58, 1059–1073). However, the 'cavalry' of Theseus' Attica are part of a *demotic* force rather than a specifically aristocratic one. When Theseus musters men to rescue Oedipus' daughters, it is the 'the people' (*leôis*) who he calls upon to suspend their sacrifices at Poseidon's altars and they are both 'horsed and unhorsed' (899). The Chorus link Poseidon's or Athena's 'equestrian' aspects to the former god's associations with the sea and naval power (712–719, 1070–1073). Athenians watching the play in 402/1 would have associated the navy with generally pro-democratic and non-elitist sentiments. Any distinct associations between this sanctuary and the oligarchy which may have persisted from 411 are blurred and displaced in this play.

Where does all this get us with dating? None of the above entitles us to say that the play was written in a particular year. However, the play's mention of a sanctuary which gained political notoriety in 411 has led many critics to limit the date of composition to sometime after that year.¹⁷ But even this is far from certain and an earlier date cannot be ruled out. It is even possible that Sophocles wrote the play gradually over many years, perhaps not even finishing it before his death in 406/5. Aristophanes joked that Sophocles' playwright son, Iophon, had help from his father (*Frogs* 72–82); Iophon and/or the younger Sophocles may have returned the favour by finishing off *Oedipus at Colonus*.

Critics often raise another possible connection between the play and the *coup* of 411. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* tells us that Sophocles was one of ten special commissioners (*probouloi*) appointed by the democracy after the

¹⁶ Siewert (1979).

¹⁷ Markantonatos (2007) 38 and Kelly (2009) 16 tentatively opt for a date after the production of *Philoctetes* in 409.

Sicilian disaster and who supported the setting up of the Four Hundred (1419a25–29). Aristotle's Sophocles admits to Peisander that his support for this regime was a wicked thing. But he maintains that there was no better option. Was Sophocles personally implicated in any negative and divisive feeling which events at Colonus attracted once the democracy was restored in 410? There is no evidence that he became unpopular in this way. But it has nevertheless been argued that Sophocles wrote *Oedipus at Colonus* as a vehicle for defending himself and the *hippeis* in the wake of 411. For Lowell Edmunds, the play is a plea for tolerance and unity which stresses that the *hippeis* are an essential ingredient of Athens' past and future greatness.¹⁸

Oedipus at Colonus undoubtedly offers a largely positive dramatization in which Colonus is praised and has a harmonious relationship with Theseus' proto-democratic Athens. But the local stranger and the Colonian Chorus are initially suspicious and ill-disposed towards Oedipus. Their hard-won compassion contrasts markedly with Theseus' instant sympathy for him. And as we have seen, there is no distinct 'class' of *hippeis* in the play. If Sophocles had wanted his play to be a political 'PR exercise' for himself, his fellow Colonians, and the *hippeis*, he would surely have adopted a different strategy to this.

Sophocles' main reason for setting this play in Colonus was probably an existing and well-known association between this town and Oedipus' hero cult. In Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, probably performed between 411 and 409, Oedipus tells Antigone that an oracle has decreed that he will 'die in Athens' (1704). When she asks 'which tower of Atthis will receive you?', he replies 'Holy Colonus, the home of the horse-god' (1705–1706). Scholars have worried that these lines are a later interpolation or influenced by knowledge of what Sophocles was planning in his play.¹⁹ But they may indicate a well-known story that Oedipus was *received* at Colonus prior to his burial in Attica. Interestingly, the Euripidean lines do not tell us where he was actually buried. (The tomb would always mark the site of the sanctuary at which the dead hero was actually worshipped.)

Oedipus at Colonus is also coy about the exact location of Oedipus' tomb. Although the play leads us to expect that he will be buried in Colonus, Sophocles 'goes out of his way to avoid saying that the tomb is definitely there'.²⁰ The nearest we get is the messenger's description of the place where

¹⁸ Edmunds (1996).

¹⁹ See Mastronarde (1994) 626; Kelly (2009) 144n16.

²⁰ Kelly (2009) 43.

Oedipus sits down in preparation for his death (1590–1597). Its topographical details evoke a complex and polyvalent array of ritual symbols and geographical associations which seem to have links with the worship of the Eumenides, Demeter, and Persephone in different parts of Attica. The messenger's language also links this location to the play's prior establishment of Oedipus' links to the Eumenides and the mystery cult at Eleusis.²¹ We cannot know for sure whether or not the audience would have recognized this description or if it corresponded to any real location. In any case, the actual place of Oedipus' burial is left a secret.

Of course, there are dramatic and ritual reasons why the whereabouts of Oedipus' interment and the manner of his worship are to be kept a closely guarded secret. The presentation of Oedipus' death has affinities with mystery rites which Athenians practised in honour of Demeter.²² And real fifth-century hero cults were attended by similar levels of secrecy so that the hero's power could not be harnessed by enemies.²³ Secrecy about Oedipus' future cult is also important within the world of the play, given that the Thebans are seeking control of Oedipus' body.

There may be another reason why Sophocles chose to associate Oedipus' cult so closely with Colonus whilst at the same time obscuring its precise location. Pausanias (second century AD) knew of two cults honouring Oedipus: one in Colonus and another on the Areopagus in Athens (1.30.4; 1.28.6). The latter cult was connected to the worship of the Eumenides (otherwise known as the *Semnai Theai*—'Reverend Goddesses'). A fourth-century BC historian corroborates the Colonian cult but associates it with Oedipus' supplication of Demeter and Athena *Polioukhos* ('city-holder') (Androtion *FGrHist* 324 F 62). This means that we should entertain the possibility that Sophocles wanted to evoke the two real Oedipus cults by conflating them. Hence he invented a sanctuary of the Eumenides at Colonus and was deliberately inexact about the location of his hero's tomb.²⁴

²¹ For the details, interpretation, and further bibliography, see Easterling (2006b) 141–144; Kelly (2009) 101.

²² For the importance of Demeter, Persephone, and the Eleusinian mysteries in the play, see Seaford (1994b) and Kelly (2009) 81–82. Easterling (2006b) shows that the messenger's description of Oedipus' death makes him analogous to these goddesses and the Eumenides in that 'he bestows a salvific secret' (p. 143).

²³ Kearns (1989) 51–52; Edmunds (1996) 97–100.

²⁴ This is the tentative suggestion of Kelly (2009) 43. Kearns (1989) 208–209 thinks two cults could not have co-existed and opts for Colonus as the real one. The only evidence for a sanctuary to the Eumenides at Colonus is a roof tile with the inscription '*Semnai Theai*'. See Henrichs (1994) 49.

The play thus links Oedipus' cult to a process in which Athens' mythical king accepts and shelters a man whom most view as an abomination; whether or not Sophocles intended it to do so, this connection must have had some political and ideological resonance with the audience of 402/1. By this time, Athens had lost the war to Peloponnesian forces (including Thebans) and had suffered the brutal oligarchic regime of the Thirty which the Spartans had backed (404/3 BC). There had been atrocities and civil war (*stasis*) between the oligarchic and democratic factions. But democracy had then been restored and in 403/2 an amnesty agreement was put in place in an effort to heal the deep-seated hatred and desire for score-settling which existed between the two sides. It is therefore easy to see how Theseus' instinctive attitude of sympathy and its implicit association with the past military and imperial glories of a unified Athens could have been seen as a model for what needed to happen in 402/1.

It was particularly pertinent to the period immediately following the amnesty that *Oedipus at Colonus* presented a narrative in which the present and immediate acceptance of a monstrous outsider brings greater security for the *polis* in the future. The amnesty of 403/2 was guaranteed by sworn oaths and pledges (Andocides, *On the Mysteries* 90–91). *Oedipus at Colonus* makes it clear that Oedipus' safety and the benefits he confers after death are dependent on Theseus being true to his word, although a formal pact between Oedipus and the Athenian ruler is only enacted during the old man's final moments (1629–1637). This linkage between Theseus' integrity and a secure future for Athens might well have spoken to Athenians of the importance of remaining true to the amnesty.²⁵

Theseus also reminded these Athenians of their city's reputed commitment to impartial justice and the rule of law (*nomos*). As he says in his rebuke to Creon: 'you came to a city that abides by justice and decides nothing without *nomos*' (913–914). Theseus is much more restrained than Oedipus in his approach to the typically Greek notion of retributive or retaliatory justice (sometimes known as the 'talio'). In his dealings with Creon, for example, 'he employs the talio to rectify injustice, not to gratify personal enmity.'²⁶ As Blundell acutely observes, Theseus' 'rational control over emotions' allows him to act as the 'moral conscience of other characters when they get carried away by emotion'.²⁷ This facility of Theseus to be fair,

²⁵ See Markantonatos (2007) 171–193.

²⁶ Blundell (1989a) 250.

²⁷ Blundell (1989a) 250.

measured and reasonable both in his own actions and his (highly intellectual) arguments with others is striking. When his daughters are rescued, Oedipus himself praises Theseus and his fellow Athenians for their 'fairness' or 'equity' (*toupieikes*, 1127). In 402/1, this representation of piety, intelligence, restraint, and reasonableness as traditionally Athenian virtues could have been applied to the restored democracy's rhetoric of amnesty.

However, it is also possible to imagine that *Oedipus at Colonus* allowed its audience to see problems with the virtues of reconciliation, lawfulness, and tolerance. Oedipus' intransigence and remorseless hatred towards his own sons may have prompted some Athenians to ask whether one *should* be reconciled to those who, like the old protagonist himself, cannot put aside their anger and hostility. Even if they saw Oedipus' cursing repudiation of his sons as justified (as most modern critics do), this might have suggested to them that betrayals should never be excused or overlooked. The play's representation of Antigone as a doomed figure who maintains her love and loyalty towards both sides of the schism in her family may have invited further identifications and complex responses from a citizenry that had recently experienced the costs of violent *stasis*.

2. *Suppliants and Saviours*

As they watched the events of *Oedipus at Colonus*' prologue unfold, the audience may well have assumed that they were watching a 'suppliant drama' along the lines of Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and Euripides' *Suppliants*. The setting of our play in an Attic sanctuary would also lead them to align it with tragedies which specifically dramatized mythical Athens' commitment to protect suppliants on its soil: one thinks of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* or Euripides' *Children of Heracles*. In these plays, a character or group of characters in a state of extreme vulnerability seek refuge and salvation from a city's leader by installing themselves at a god's sanctuary in that city. They then make a formal plea for help and protection to the city's ruler via ritualized gestures and language which are designed to place the ruler under a religious obligation to accept the supplication.

Tragic supplication always presents that ruler with a dilemma. On the one hand, there is the religious obligation and an ethical-ideological argument that the city, if it is to remain true to its values, must offer protection to the vulnerable and powerless. On the other hand, acceptance of the suppliant(s) entails that the ruler risk the safety of his own citizens in the face of a hostile force with the intent to harm or thwart the characters who have won

asylum. And it is not always the case that the suppliant(s) have acted blamelessly themselves or will do so once the supplication is accepted. However, in these plays the leader always accepts the supplication, even if he was initially reluctant and there has had to be a debate on the matter. Then the enemies of the suppliant(s) take action which forces the host city to defend their interests militarily. The enemies are defeated and the safety and wishes of the suppliant(s) are upheld.

Oedipus at Colonus satisfies these expectations in broad outline. But, as an important article by Peter Burian has shown, the tragedy offers a number of surprises and twists upon that typical schema.²⁸ For example, while Oedipus calls himself a suppliant, he never *formally* supplicates Theseus. Instead, Oedipus secures access to, and support from, the Athenian king by promising that his city will gain much in return. For Burian, it is this emerging picture of the old man as *both* suppliant *and* powerful 'saviour-to-be' which constitutes the play's innovative distance from the traditional tragic pattern.²⁹

Once we frame Oedipus' struggle to become a saviour-hero after death with the conventions of suppliant drama, the tragedy reveals both its structural coherence and its capacity to surprise audience expectation. Thus, the Creon scene is 'fundamentally the expected impediment to *sôtêria* (salvation) found in every suppliant play'.³⁰ At the same time, Polyneices' unannounced entrance and supplication of his father is a dramatic and unexpected departure from the norms of suppliant tragedy. The audience would not have expected a *second* scene of supplication within one play. Polyneices' approach casts Oedipus in the role of potential saviour while he is still alive.

Alongside the sheer drama of the scene, Oedipus' angry rejection of his son's supplication underlines the reversal in the old man's fortunes.³¹ No longer a suppliant himself, and as a powerful saviour-hero in waiting, Oedipus' emphatic dismissal of his son exudes a startling level of self-conviction. Although he is clear that he has cursed his sons in the past, Oedipus seems to have gained greater confidence and clarity in his prophetic knowledge now that he is so close to the fulfilment of his cultic destiny.

²⁸ Burian (1974). See also Kelly (2009) 75–79.

²⁹ This is not to say that other 'suppliant plays' are all the same and offer no surprises and twists of their own. See Hall (2010) 245–248.

³⁰ Burian (1974) 425.

³¹ Burian (1974) 425.

But consider the vehement, visceral hostility with which the curse is uttered: 'be off, spat upon by me who am no more your father, villain of villains (*kakiste kakôn*), taking with you these curses' (1383–1384). Does Sophocles not force his audience to condemn Oedipus' implacability here? Oedipus' cultic destiny offers one of several reasons why we should not assume that he does. For Oedipus' implacable, vengeful hostility towards those who have done him wrong conforms to a common element in attested narratives of a hero's transformation into an object of cult worship whose power is sufficient to protect his adoptive city against its enemies.³² In this respect, as Seaford stresses, it is no accident that Oedipus' final hours see him reaffirming his relationships of hostility and securing his future as a city's protector in a place which is sacred to goddesses who have both a 'kindly' aspect (as the *Semnai* and *Eumenides*) and an ancient function of embodying the vengeful anger of injured kin (as the *Furies*).³³ Oedipus seems to invoke the latter function in his curses against Creon (864, 1010) and Polyneices (1391, 1433). But he also suggests a link between 'these awesome goddesses (*Semnai*) who protect the land' and his promise to become 'a great saviour' for Athens (457–460).

So Oedipus' rejection of a supplication and his violent curses against both sons might have been perceived to be part-and-parcel of his knowing journey towards becoming Athens' saviour-hero. And this fact offers some measure of explanation for his implacable hatred towards his own kin. The point about cult heroes, it is argued, is they are 'somehow more than human in their achievements and failures' and 'can, for all their destructiveness in life, become after death something useful and socially beneficial'.³⁴ Indeed, Sophocles' depiction of Oedipus' Athenian cult as the culmination of his enmity towards his Theban family offers his audience an aetiology for the real and almost permanent condition of hostility which existed between Athens and Thebes in the archaic and classical periods.³⁵

3. *Judging Oedipus*

If Sophocles frames Oedipus' unbending hatred in terms of his future cultic function, does that mean that the old man's attitude is unproblematic? Burian argues that 'we do not condemn Oedipus for not sharing Antigone's

³² See Seaford (1994a) 130–139; Kelly (2009) 79–85.

³³ Seaford (1994a) 132–133.

³⁴ Kelly (2009) 84.

³⁵ Seaford (1994a) 130–139; Hall (1997) 102–103.

gentler view, because it has no place in his heroic world, is based on a love he does not share and a code he cannot accept. As befits the hero he is becoming, Oedipus' hatreds and loves are absolute'.³⁶ And so, if an Athenian audience is aware that they are watching an aetiological dramatization of Oedipus' fated transformation from suppliant to a daemonic, heroic saviour of Athens, then they do not judge Oedipus' curses by the lights of ordinary human morality. They know that Oedipus' fate is intertwined with that of Polyneices and Eteocles.³⁷ And they know that Oedipus has what Knox calls 'the heroic temper'. His is a 'superhuman anger' which stems 'from the outraged sense of justice not of a mortal man and father but of the forces which govern the universe'.³⁸

However, not all critics have bought into the notion that Oedipus is beyond the boundaries of ordinary moral judgment. Adrian Kelly has claimed that *Oedipus at Colonus*' explicit inscription of hero cult is 'one of the structured, institutionalized ways in which the gap between the worlds of the play and the audience may be bridged, illustrating to the latter where they have come from, and in what ways they represent an improvement upon, that heroic world'.³⁹ From a different perspective, Pat Easterling has argued that, until the miracle of the final scene, Oedipus is *not* a daemonic hero: 'Sophocles throughout the play takes pains to present Oedipus as a *man*, a man who behaves in a characteristically human way'.⁴⁰ Both of these perspectives leave room for an Oedipus who *can* be judged by his human audience on their terms.

Most critics think that *Oedipus at Colonus* steers its audience firmly in the direction of approving Oedipus' actions and condemning both his sons and Creon.⁴¹ Blundell puts it rather well: 'Oedipus abides by conventional moral norms, is condemned by no one in the play, and maintains his moral consistency. His enemies are shown to deserve punishment and his friends assistance'.⁴² An audience may have followed Antigone in being uneasy about Oedipus' malevolence towards his own kin (*philoï*). But they would also have seen that Oedipus simply applies the Greek norm of 'help friends (*philoï*)/harm enemies (*echthroi*)' and retaliatory justice. By allowing his

³⁶ Burian (1974) 427. See also Winnington-Ingram (1980) 248–280.

³⁷ Burian (1974) 427.

³⁸ Knox (1964) 160.

³⁹ Kelly (2009) 84.

⁴⁰ Easterling (1967a) 1–2.

⁴¹ A notable and persuasive exception is Kelly (2009) 52–64 and 121–133.

⁴² Blundell (1989a) 258.

exile, his sons treated him as if they were his *echthroi* rather than his *philoí*. When we add the fact that Classical Greek culture expected children to show immense respect and care towards their parents, then Oedipus' categorization of his sons as hateful enemies who must be punished for their crimes against him becomes much more understandable as an act of reciprocal justice.

And yet, when we look closely at Oedipus' scene with Polyneices, Sophocles seems to suggest that while the old man's position is justified, it is also appalling. First, note how he makes the action of this, the play's second supplication, closely resemble the first.⁴³ The revelation of Polyneices' identity is initially met with horror and reluctance to hear the suppliant out (1169–1178). The same thing happened to Oedipus (220–236). Antigone mollifies the unfriendly onstage audience of both supplications (237–253, 1181–1203). Polyneices appeals to his and Oedipus' shared experience as exiles (1292–1298, 133–137). Theseus cited his own past exile as a reason to be sympathetic to Oedipus' supplication (562–568). Both father and son ask that the object of their supplication not repay them with dishonour (48, 298, 428, 1273–1278). All these similarities and parallels serve to accentuate the difference in outcome between the two supplications. Oedipus' sense of personal injury and grievance means that he cannot mirror Theseus' more generous spirit. We may object that Theseus has not been wronged by Oedipus, whereas Polyneices has wronged his father. But the fact remains that, unlike Theseus, Oedipus does not convert the similarities between himself and his suppliant into feelings of compassion.

Second, note how the rejection and cursing of Polyneices would have shocked the audience, both because tragic supplications usually succeed and because Oedipus' son is a sympathetically-drawn and rounded character. (At another level, of course, the audience perhaps suspects that Polyneices is doomed, whilst surely hoping that Oedipus will somehow be persuaded to reconcile with him.) For, as Burian points out, his words to his father have to be understood in terms of their marked contrast to the attitude and tactics of Creon.⁴⁴ It is true that both Creon and Polyneices seek to use Oedipus and the oracles concerning him for their own ends. But where Creon shows no true concern for Oedipus, Polyneices is very different. His confrontation with his destitute and downtrodden father leads him to recognize his father's great suffering and his own guilt in causing it (1254–1256,

⁴³ See Easterling (1967a) 5–6; Burian (1974) 422–429; Kelly (2009) 78–79.

⁴⁴ Burian (1974) 423–426.

1264–1266). He does not try to justify his past treatment of Oedipus but instead begs for mercy (1267–1270). And unlike Creon, Polyneices is open and honest about his self-seeking intentions and Oedipus' role in fulfilling them (1291–1345).

Third, note that the immediate aftermath of the rejected supplication brings about even more audience sympathy and pity, and not just for Polyneices. Polyneices refuses Antigone's anguished pleas to call off an expedition which is doomed to end in both brothers' deaths (and also Antigone's). As they watch Antigone lamenting for him as if he is already dead, the audience know that Oedipus' curses will annihilate most of his offspring, including the daughter whom he loves and whose devotion to him has been faultless. With great pathos, Polyneices asks his sisters to see to his burial should Oedipus' curse come to fruition (1399–1413). These unmistakable evocations of the love and obligations which bring about Antigone's death in Sophocles' earlier play *Antigone* spell out the terrible costs of Oedipus' desire to satisfy his anger through retribution. These three features of the scene must have made an audience wince with what Easterling calls 'appalled awe' at Oedipus' wrath.⁴⁵

Oedipus rejects his son's overture and curses him because he does not think that Polyneices' current remorse and sympathy make up for his past actions. Oedipus says that Polyneices weeps now that he sees his father in rags and is himself experiencing 'the same turmoil of troubles as I' (1358). Polyneices remains responsible for Oedipus' banishment because he was in power when his father was sent away (1354–1359). He deserves the title 'murderer' because Oedipus would have died during his cityless wanderings were it not for the love and care of his daughters (1360–1368). Oedipus believes that Justice (*Dikē*) sits alongside Zeus and trumps the authority of Polyneices' supplication (1380–1382).

These pronouncements are entirely consistent with the polarized stance Oedipus has displayed towards his sons and daughters in the play's preceding action.⁴⁶ And it is important to stress that Oedipus' self-centred attitude is mitigated by his genuine love and appreciation for his daughters (e.g. 1613–1619). There is also a lot to be said for Easterling's observation that 'one of the play's greatest ironies is that while Oedipus has himself violated the natural laws in the worst possible way, by committing parricide and incest, he is innocent, as Sophocles repeatedly tells us, but his sons, who have done

⁴⁵ Easterling (1967a) 11.

⁴⁶ Easterling (1967a).

the same thing in a less extreme form, are guilty'.⁴⁷ But I hope I have shown that Sophocles uses structural parallels, pathos, and characterization to provoke considerable disquiet about Oedipus' actions and temperament.

4. *An Intertextual Tragedy*

At one level, *Oedipus at Colonus* is self-contained: you do not need to have seen *Oedipus Tyrannus* or *Antigone* for this tragedy to make sense or to have a profound impact. On the other hand, its audience needs to know that Polyneices and Eteocles *really will* end up slaying each other and that Oedipus *really did* kill a stranger who turned out to be his father and married a woman who he did not realize was his mother. Because they were a popular subject of epic and tragedy, certain aspects of the Theban story would have been well known. A fragment of late fifth-century comedy implies that a tragedian could assume such general knowledge from the outset: 'if I say "Oedipus" they know all the rest' (Antiphanes 189 K-A).

And yet, different versions and details of Oedipus' story coexisted in the fifth century and it was not impossible for a tragic playwright to innovate. For example, where *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus* both presuppose a version where Oedipus is exiled from Thebes, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* offer a version in which he continues to rule the city and his death is celebrated by Theban funeral games.⁴⁸ The fact that *Oedipus Tyrannus* is centred on exile as Oedipus' likely fate once his true identity and crimes are discovered means that it is following the same tradition as *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*.⁴⁹

We have already seen how *Oedipus at Colonus* takes on fresh layers of ambivalence, darkness, and irony if we regard the *Antigone* as the 'what happened next' to Oedipus' daughters/sisters. These intertextual resonances reach their climax when Antigone and Ismene leave Colonus in the final scene: 'The *Oedipus Coloneus* draws also on the power of its great tragic predecessor, to layer Antigone's imagined future with her own bleak intensity. When Antigone exits (1168–1172) towards Thebes to try to stop the intrafamilial slaughter—sent on her way to her own death graciously by Theseus (1173–1177)—the sense of further impending disaster is emphatic'.⁵⁰ It was

⁴⁷ Easterling (1967a) 10.

⁴⁸ See Hom. *Il.* 23.679–680, *Od.* 11.275–276.

⁴⁹ Bernard (2001) 60–63.

⁵⁰ Goldhill (2009b) 35.

also interesting for a knowing audience to see how the intransigent heroine of *Antigone* is both like her father and yet also consistent with the pious, gentle, and reasonable woman depicted in *Oedipus at Colonus*.

Many critics also assume that Sophocles wanted his audience to regard *Oedipus at Colonus* as a continuation of *Oedipus Tyrannus* and wrote the later play with the earlier one in mind. And if we do regard the Oedipus of the two plays as one and the same man (as opposed to two discrete dramatic interpretations of the same mythical figure), there is much to be gained. For we are then able to compare Oedipus' changed perspective on his transgressions and his place in the world in *Oedipus at Colonus* with his anguish and humiliation at the end of *Oedipus Tyrannus*.⁵¹ At the same time, we can also see Oedipus' wrathful nature as a constant between the two plays. This is not to say that *Oedipus Tyrannus* has an entirely seamless relationship with *Oedipus at Colonus*. But there are no glaring contradictions.⁵²

Oedipus at Colonus can even be seen to play upon some notorious uncertainties in the transmitted ending of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. In that ending, it is left unclear whether or when Oedipus will achieve the exile from Thebes which he demands from Creon.⁵³ Despite Oedipus' decree that the murderer of Laius be banished in accordance with instructions offered by the Delphic oracle, Creon indicates that another messenger must be sent to Delphi to determine Oedipus' fate (*OT* 1438ff.). As Oedipus continues to press for immediate exile, Creon's answers are evasive and oracular (*OT* 1515ff.). The ending gives a strong indication that Oedipus enters the palace but what will happen to him in the longer term is left unresolved.

In some ways, *Oedipus at Colonus* provides the 'closure' and resolution to Oedipus' story which this ending denied. And yet, Sophocles also took a decision to have his protagonist offer inconsistent accounts of exactly how his exile came about. One account is part of Oedipus' response to Ismene's news that Creon is coming to get him. At this point, the Chorus are listening and the question of whether Oedipus will be able to remain in Attica is still unanswered. Oedipus curses his sons, explaining that they did not prevent the city from forcing him into unwanted exile (421–430, 440–444). Once he was in exile, his sons did not support him (428–429). Oedipus claims that he wanted to be stoned to death on first learning of his crimes, but no one

⁵¹ E.g. Jebb (2004, orig. 1900) ix–xii, xxi–xxii; Segal (1981a) 370.

⁵² For the issues, see Kelly (2009) 46.

⁵³ For a good review of the problems and the scholarship, see Burian (2009).

came forward to fulfil that wish (433–436). After many years his suffering abated and he realized that he had been too eager to punish himself (437–439).

His second account forms part of his angry response to Creon (765–799). Here he claims that he had initially wanted to go into exile, but Creon had refused him (765–767). Then, after some time elapsed, he calmed down, realized there was mitigation for his crimes, and decided that he wanted to remain in Thebes. At that point, Creon had forced his banishment (768–771). In this account, then, Oedipus' initial desire for execution has been replaced by the desire for exile which we are familiar with from *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Kelly points out that these two accounts are mutually exclusive and that Oedipus is not consistent over whom he blames for his banishment.⁵⁴ It is particularly telling that he holds Creon responsible when arguing with him face-to-face but blames only Polyneices when he arrives to win his father over to his cause (770, 1356–1357). Indeed, there is a strong suggestion that Oedipus adapts his accounts of the past for rhetorical and contextual purposes. For example, it suits Oedipus to claim that he initially wanted to be executed for his crimes when he is talking in front of a Chorus who have themselves reacted with revulsion on learning his identity. But if we are meant to notice that Oedipus is a somewhat unreliable narrator, it is equally significant that nobody in the play contests Oedipus' versions of events. Markantonatos has shown that Oedipus' almost complete narratorial control of the past is bound up with his divinely-favoured mastery of what will happen in the future.⁵⁵ For every account of the past which argues for his own moral innocence and undeserved exile there is a matching curse which seals his sons' fate. And each time Oedipus returns to his past, he also offers us a more detailed and specific version of his and their future.

That Oedipus is making choices and utterances which lead him towards the destiny laid out in Apollo's oracle is another fact which places *Oedipus at Colonus* in a close thematic and structural relationship with *Oedipus Tyrannus*.⁵⁶ In *Oedipus at Colonus* Oedipus does not fight against or misunderstand the special knowledge about his final goal which the oracle had given him. In the earlier play, Oedipus' knowledge of the oracle led him to attempt to defy its provisions and that defiance in turn pushed him ironically and unwittingly towards their fulfilment. In *Oedipus Tyrannus* we have

⁵⁴ Kelly (2009) 63–64.

⁵⁵ Markantonatos (2002) 53–75.

⁵⁶ E.g. Seidensticker (1972); Bernard (2001) 58–83; Segal (2001²) 131–143.

Oedipus' fall from a position of honour and authority to that of a powerless, self-blinded abomination. And we also see Oedipus' apparent intellect and knowledge yielding to the truth that he has been ignorant of his true identity. In *Oedipus at Colonus* he ascends from the status of a blind, exiled beggar reliant on the kindness and guidance of others to that of a powerful, talismanic figure with secret and sacred knowledge. He even transcends his physical limitations and blindness to guide Theseus to the place of his death.

More detailed and scene-specific intertextual relationships have also been traced between the two plays.⁵⁷ While rightly cautioning that it does not offer a complete map of either play, Seidensticker offers us this schema as a useful summary:

<i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>	<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>
Oedipus the mighty hero A	E Oedipus the blind beggar
Oedipus and Teiresias B	D Oedipus' 'interrogation'
Oedipus and Creon C	C Oedipus and Creon
Oedipus' 'interrogation' D	B Oedipus and Polyneices
Oedipus the blind beggar E	A Oedipus the mighty hero ⁵⁸

Within *Oedipus at Colonus*' broad thematic and structural reversal of *Oedipus Tyrannus* there are also 'mirrorings' between the two plays. For example, both plays' prologues and exodoi have very similar structures (in other words, A = E and E = A). But some of the more significant instances of 'intertextuality' operate through the marked *differences* between 'mirrored' scenes. A case in point is the 'Oedipus and Creon' scene in the two plays (*OT* 512–677, *OC* 727–1044). Theseus' calm, firm, and fair handling of Creon in the *Oedipus at Colonus* scene invites comparison with Oedipus' ill-tempered and misguided treatment of the same man in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Both men come across as sharp-witted but we sense a contrast in their temperaments and styles of leadership.⁵⁹ Oedipus' own response to Creon in *Oedipus at Colonus* is freighted with irony if we compare it with the *Oedipus Tyrannus* scene. This time Oedipus is right to be suspicious of Creon. This time Oedipus' anger with Creon is much more informed and righteous.

⁵⁷ See Seidensticker (1972) 264–274; Markantonatos (2007) 195–230 and Kelly (2009) 45–51.

⁵⁸ Seidensticker (1972) 273 [as adapted into English by Kelly (2009) 46].

⁵⁹ Markantonatos (2007) 212–213.

This sense that the Oedipus of *Oedipus at Colonus* has attained more knowledge and understanding than his younger self in *Oedipus Tyrannus* is central to our understanding of Sophocles' second treatment of this complex and fascinating character. This old man knows who he *really* is and what he is destined to become. But it is a mistake to think that the older man is now a *model* of all-seeing wisdom and virtue. The tragedy's intertextual resonances suggest that the old Oedipus who has come to save Athens retains the flawed temperament which he displayed both before and after he saved Thebes from the Sphinx.

FRAGMENTS AND LOST TRAGEDIES

Alan H. Sommerstein

Of the three great fifth-century tragic dramatists, Sophocles had the longest career and the largest output; but both absolutely and proportionately, more of his work is lost to us than of that of either Aeschylus or Euripides.¹ From the fourth century BC until the end of antiquity, Euripides was the most popular of the three; more of his plays survived into the Middle Ages than of the other two combined, and, of those that did not survive, quotations, papyri, and other sources preserve far more material than they do for Aeschylus or Sophocles. Aeschylus was relatively little read in later antiquity, but he got lucky, three times over. He was lucky to retain a place in the school curriculum, so that a seven-play selection continued to be copied; lucky that all these plays made it through to the age of printing, thanks to the survival of a single manuscript, without which *Suppliants* and *Libation-Bearers* would not have survived; and lucky that about 200AD a great admirer of his work happened to live in Oxyrhynchus—for to this man's library we owe almost all of our fairly substantial corpus of Aeschylean papyri.

Sophocles' ancient biographer states, on the excellent authority of Aristophanes of Byzantium, that he wrote 130 plays, of which 17 were regarded

¹ The standard edition of the fragments of Sophocles is Radt (1999); Lloyd-Jones (1996) is invaluable for easy reference and for its translations, though it does not include the many very short fragments. The play-introductions and commentary by Pearson (1917), though dated, give fuller and clearer information than any other edition about the ancient sources then known; the play-introductions by Lucas de Dios (1983) are thorough and judicious, though he is inclined to sit on the fence and unduly reluctant to quote secondary sources even in translation. Carden (1974) is an excellent edition of most of the major papyrus fragments then known, including those of *Eurypylus*, *Niobe* (this section was contributed by W.S. Barrett) and *The Scyrians*. Sommerstein et al. (2006, 2012) edit sixteen fragmentary tragedies with introductions, translations, and commentaries; their bibliographies will guide the reader to earlier literature on these plays (more recent work on these, and studies of other plays, are listed in the table on pp. 199–202 below). Jouanna (2007) 609–676 gives short accounts of all the fragmentary plays, and there is a good brief survey of the corpus by Cropp (2005) 277–280. Kassel (2005) and Harvey (2005) between them provide a retrospect of five centuries of study of tragic fragments. Radt (1982) takes his readers on a rich and rewarding study-tour of the fragments; Sommerstein (2003a) comprises twenty studies, general or specific, of Sophocles' fragmentary works.

(presumably by the cataloguers of the Alexandrian Library) as spurious (*Vita Sophoclis* 18). The *Suda* lexicon's entry for him gives a total of 123 plays (*Suda* s815). These two statements can be reconciled if we assume (i) that '17' (IZ /) is a scribal error for '7' (Z /) (or vice versa) and (ii) that the allegedly spurious plays were excluded at an early date from the Sophoclean corpus; both these assumptions are entirely reasonable. We thus arrive at a figure of either 113 or 123 Sophoclean plays of whose existence the scholars of Alexandria were aware, and which they regarded as genuine.

Now if we list all the known titles of plays ascribed to Sophocles—counting twice or three times those titles for which our sources record the existence of a second or third play of the same name; counting only once those pairs of titles (such as *Atreus* or *The Women of Mycenae*) which are generally agreed to be alternative names for the same play; omitting titles probably due to scribal error, misunderstanding or misattribution; and including two plays, *Eurypylos* (fr. 206–222b) and *Oeneus* (fr. dub. 1130–1133), which we know only from papyrus fragments—we will find that their number is at least very close to 123 (including the seven plays that survive complete).² However, we cannot at once infer from this that Sophocles wrote 123 plays and that we know at least the titles of all of them. On the one hand, there are very likely further cases of a single play being known by two different names;³ after all, of the four generally accepted double titles, none is actually cited more than once, and two are not directly attested in ancient sources at all. On the other hand there may well have been further pairs of homonymous plays about which we do not happen to be informed; and there may also have been other Sophoclean plays not even mentioned by name by any surviving author. In consideration of all these factors, it seems most likely that 123 rather than 113 is the correct figure for Sophocles' total output, but that the number of distinct plays *about which we have some specific information* is significantly less than this.

If Sophocles had produced all his plays at the City Dionysia, and if his four-play productions there had always included a satyr-drama, one would have expected that in a total of 123 plays there would be 30 or 31

² Both Lloyd-Jones (1996) 4–8 and Jouanna (2007) 609–675, indeed, present lists (almost but not quite matching each other) which purport to enumerate precisely the 123 Sophoclean plays (or, equivalently, the 116 which have not survived complete).

³ The edition of Sommerstein et al. (2006) and (2012) covers nineteen of the titles on Lloyd-Jones's and Jouanna's lists, and among these we argue that *Hermione* is identical with *The Women of Phthia*, *The Diners* (*Syndeipnoi*) with *The Assembly of the Achaeans*, and *The Epigoni* with *Eriphyle*.

satyrdramas. However, from ca. 432 BC there was also a tragic competition at the Lenaea, where satyr-dramas were not produced (a production consisted of two tragedies only);⁴ there is powerful, though not absolutely watertight, epigraphic evidence that Sophocles sometimes produced at this festival.⁵ Bergk (1879, 298) plausibly conjectured that the 24 first prizes which the *Suda* says he won consisted of eighteen at the City Dionysia (cf. *IG* ii² 2325.5, Diod. Sic. 13.103.4) and six at the Lenaea. Moreover, we know that Euripides at least once put on a Dionysia production without a satyr-drama (its place was taken by *Alcestis*),⁶ and that some Euripidean satyr-dramas were completely lost, or at any rate did not reach the library of Alexandria;⁷ the same may be true of Sophocles. Thus we cannot securely determine the number of Sophoclean satyr-dramas. Thirteen lost plays are definitely known to have been satyric; roughly seven more are likely on internal evidence to be so, and for a few others it is a distinct possibility.⁸

The surviving quotations from, and papyrus fragments of, the hundred-odd lost plays amount to about 10,000 words, approximately the length of one normal tragedy. From about half these plays we possess fewer than thirty words each, from many of them fewer than ten. There are only nine plays (three of them satyric) from which we have significant papyrus fragments,⁹ compared with at least sixteen (five satyric) of Aeschylus and likewise at least sixteen (none satyric) of Euripides.

We must remember, too, that when ancient writers quoted passages from lost plays, they were not trying to enlighten us (or even, for the most part, their contemporaries) about the content, structure, or themes of the play. They might be lexicographers or grammarians, wishing to illustrate some peculiarity of linguistic usage; anthologists like Johannes Stobaeus,

⁴ *IG* ii² 2319.77–82.

⁵ *IG* ii² 2319.77–78 says that in 419/8 BC a poet whose name is lost won first prize at the Lenaea with a *Tyro*; no fifth-century poet other than Sophocles is known to have written a play of this name.

⁶ Cf. below (p. 203) on *The Diners*.

⁷ Alexandrian scholars knew of 92 Euripidean titles, but had texts of only 78 plays, of which eight were satyric—implying that 13 or 14 satyr-plays had disappeared; see Jouan/van Looy (1998) xi–xvi. Of these vanished plays we know the titles of only three, *Epeius*, *The Reapers*, and *Lamia* (see Collard/Cropp 2008, xi–xii).

⁸ See Lloyd-Jones (1996) 8–9; Rosen (2003) on *The Shepherds* [I argue otherwise in Sommerstein et al. (2012) 183–188]; López Eire (2003); Redondo (2003). In Krumeich et al. (1999) 224–398 seventeen plays are treated as being certainly or almost certainly satyric, and another seven as possibly so.

⁹ *Ajax the Locrian*, *The Epigoni*, *Eurypylos*, *Theseus* (?), *The Prophets*, *Niobe*, and the satyr-plays *Inachus*, *The Trackers*, and *Oeneus*.

quoting memorable formulations of (often commonplace) ideas, or phrases that had become proverbs or clichés; commentators on other texts, quoting passages which seemed to throw light on the text they were annotating; writers in some specialist field who had found in Sophocles a piece of information relevant to that field; or writers on almost any subject exploiting the authority attached to a famous poetic name in order to reinforce their point. Finally, quotations were generally presented without any indication of who is speaking, or to whom, or in what context.

However, actual text, preserved in papyri or quoted by ancient authors, is not the only source of our knowledge about Sophocles' lost plays. From his *Hermione*, for example, there survive only two quoted fragments (fr. 202, 203), totalling seven words; another three fragments (24 words) are cited from *The Women of Phthia*, which may or may not be the same play. But two commentators on the *Odyssey*—one ancient, the other medieval¹⁰—give fairly detailed accounts of Sophocles' presentation of the story of Neoptolemus, Hermione, and Orestes, and there are two or three other statements about the myth which agree with them on crucial points and also provide further details which may well come from Sophocles;¹¹ taking all this into account, we are better informed about *Hermione* than we are about quite a few plays of which considerably more text has survived. There are a good many such incidental statements about lost plays, which sometimes give important information, and we also have a few papyrus fragments of plot-synopses ('hypotheses'), notably for *Tereus* and *Niobe*. In addition, there is usually much information available, some of it quite detailed, about the myths on which plays were based; but we must remember that any given myth was exploited many times over in poetry and drama, and that every creative user of it is likely to have modified it in some respects. This applies at least as much to artistic evidence, important as that often is; iconographic traditions have their own history and their own logic, and even when an image is based on the dramatic presentation of a story, it will not always reflect precisely any particular scene of the drama.¹² Nevertheless, a great deal can often be inferred about the content and structure of lost Sophoclean plays from the scattered evidence which is all that is usually available. What generally remains beyond us is to determine the governing *ideas* of a play, or the themes that were prominent in its language or imagery. Even

¹⁰ Schol. *Od.* 4.3–4, and Eustathius on the same passage.

¹¹ Pherecydes fr. 64 and 135A Fowler; [Apollod.] *Epit.* 6.13–14.

¹² On this, see Shapiro (1994) 7–9 and Snodgrass (1998) 55–66.

this, however, is sometimes possible. Scarcely fifty words survive of *Troilus*, but they are enough to show that the opposition of Greek and barbarian was important in the play and that the Trojans were heavily 'orientalized' and in some respects Persianized¹³—although the reported behaviour of Achilles (he cannot have actually appeared onstage) can have been, to say the least, no great advertisement for Hellenic civilization.

Sophocles' plays, like those of Aeschylus and Euripides, were based on a wide range of stories selected from the whole corpus of heroic myth known to the Athenians of his time. He concentrates strongly, however, on one section of that corpus, the saga cycle built around the Trojan War. Nearly half his plays (47%) depicted episodes either in that war, its antecedents or its aftermath, or in the lives of its participants, or of those who, like Orestes, became involved in its after-effects; the comparable figures for Aeschylus and Euripides are 29% and 28% respectively. And yet in his coverage of the Trojan story Sophocles leaves a notable gap. Like Aeschylus and Euripides, he draws most of his plots from the post-Homeric 'cyclic' epics—the *Cypria*, *Aethiopis*, *Little Iliad*, *Sack of Troy*, *Returns*, and *Telegony*;¹⁴ he also once or twice makes use of episodes from the *Odyssey*.¹⁵ But while he had a deep knowledge and understanding of the *Iliad* and (as is seen especially in *Ajax*) loved to allude to it and recycle its themes,¹⁶ he never himself dramatized any part of the poem as Aeschylus had done in *The Myrmidons*, *The Nereids*, and *The Phrygians*.

On the other hand, contrary to the impression created by his extant plays, Sophocles was *not* particularly fond of the saga of the royal house of Labdacus and Laius at Thebes. It is, in fact, the only major story cycle on which he wrote *fewer* plays than either of the other two major tragedians—seven at most, compared with eight each by Aeschylus and Euripides; and the non-extant 'Labdacid' plays¹⁷ all deal with the same small part of the saga, the story of the prophet Amphiaraus, his wife Eriphyle, and their son Alcmeon. As we shall see, this is not the only respect in which the seven extant plays represent a skewed sample of Sophoclean drama.

¹³ See frs. 620, 622, 629, 631, 632, 634. I discuss this feature of the play in Sommerstein et al. (2006) 204–205, 207, 228–231, 242–243.

¹⁴ On these, see Davies (1989) and West (2003). Athenaeus 7.277e speaks of Sophocles as 'delighting in the epic cycle'.

¹⁵ In *Nausicaa* or *The Washerwomen*; in *The Phaeacians*, if this was a different play; and probably in *The Foot-Washing* (*Niptra*).

¹⁶ See Easterling (1984).

¹⁷ *The Epigoni* and *Eriphyle* (if these are distinct plays), *Amphiaraus* (apparently a satyr-drama), and *Alcmeon*.

In the rest of this chapter I will be dealing only with Sophocles' fragmentary *tragedies*; Sophoclean satyr-drama is discussed in the following chapter.

Both the finiteness of the mythic corpus, and the natural dynamics of a highly competitive profession, ensured that tragic poets would frequently measure themselves against each other by dramatizing subjects already treated by a predecessor or rival. Both Sophocles and Euripides often followed in Aeschylus' footsteps; at least eight times, indeed, the same Aeschylean subject was taken up by both.¹⁸ In all, Sophocles appears to have recycled an Aeschylean subject seventeen or eighteen times to Euripides' fourteen—not too different from the proportion one would expect, given Sophocles' greater total output.¹⁹

There were twenty instances in all of essentially the same story being given tragic form both by Sophocles and by Euripides (including those also treated by Aeschylus).²⁰ In two of these cases (the *Hippolytus* plays and the *Phrixus* plays) Euripides used the subject twice, so that twenty-two of his seventy tragedies—nearly a third—shared a subject with a play of Sophocles. It appears to have been usually Sophocles who tackled a subject first and Euripides who imitated him; this can be explained partly by the fact that Euripides' career began more than a decade later and made a slow start (he did not win a first prize until 441 BC, twenty-seven years after Sophocles), and partly by Sophocles' greater competitive success, which made it more tempting for Euripides to imitate him than vice versa. There is one certain case in which a play of Euripides was followed by one of Sophocles on the same subject (*Philoctetes*)²¹ and one probable case (*Electra*);²² in addition it is

¹⁸ The Aeschylean plays concerned were *Athamas* (Euripides' two corresponding plays both bore the title *Phrixus*), *Iphigeneia*, *The Cretan Women* (Soph. *The Prophets* or *Polyidus*, Eur. *Polyidus*), *Oedipus*, *Palamedes* (used by Sophocles not only for his *Palamedes* but also for *The Arrival of Nauplius*), *Philoctetes*, and *The Libation-bearers* (Soph. and Eur. *Electra*).

¹⁹ Those named in note 17, plus the subjects of Aeschylus' *The Epigoni*, *The Thracians* (Soph. *Ajax*), *Memnon*, *The Mysians*, *Hypsipyle* (Soph. *The Lemnian Women*), *Niobe*, *The Women of Salamis* (Soph. *Teucer*), *Phineus*, one of Aeschylus' two plays about Ixion, and probably *Penelope* (Soph. *The Foot-Washing*, see above).

²⁰ Those named in note 17, plus the subjects of Sophocles' *Aegeus*, *Alexandros*, *Alcmeon*, *Andromeda*, *Antigone*, *Hermione* (Eur. *Andromache*), *Creusa* (Eur. *Ion*), *Meleager*, *Oenomaus*, *Polyxena* (Eur. *Hecuba*), *Phaedra* (Eur. *Hippolytus*), and either *Danaë* or *Acrisius* (unless indeed they were one and the same play).

²¹ Euripides' play was produced in 431 BC (Hypothesis II to *Medea*), Sophocles' in 409 BC (Hypothesis II to *Philoctetes*).

²² The relative dating of the two *Electras* remains highly controversial (cf. Finglass 2007, 1–4); but March (2001) 21–22 brings powerful arguments for the priority of Euripides' play.

likely that Euripides' first *Hippolytus* preceded Sophocles' *Phaedra*, though his second *Hippolytus* (the extant play) came later.²³ Against this there are at least six cases in which it is certain or highly probable that Sophocles' play came first (*Andromeda*,²⁴ *Antigone*,²⁵ *Hermione/Andromache*,²⁶ *Iphigeneia*,²⁷ *Oedipus*²⁸ and *Polyxena/Hecuba*)²⁹ and several more in which the balance of probability favours Sophoclean priority either because Euripides' play is known to be late³⁰ or because there is good reason to believe that Sophocles' play is an early one.³¹

It is rare for us to have enough information both about a fragmentary play of Sophocles and about its Aeschylean precursor to reach enlightening conclusions about the relationship between their treatments of the story. More than once, however, Sophocles seems to have daringly sensationalized the old story, just as he did in *Ajax* by coming as close as he could to bringing the hero's suicide onstage.³² In *Niobe*, indeed, he did something like the same thing again, in the scene where Artemis is shown shooting at Niobe's daughters from the palace roof; in *The Mysians* he seems to have invented an ingeniously horrific plot in which filicide, matricide, and incest are all averted by a hair's breadth;³³ and in *Palamedes* he gave a horrendous twist to the tale of Odysseus' plot to cause the judicial murder of Palamedes by fabricating evidence of treason against him, by having Odysseus volunteer to *act as Palamedes' defence counsel* and challenge his accusers to search for incriminating evidence at the site of Palamedes' tent—where Palamedes knew, or thought he knew, that none could be found, but where Odysseus himself had arranged for some Trojan gold to

²³ See Barrett (1964) 29–30, and Talbot and Sommerstein in Sommerstein et al. (2006) 266–272, 287–289; the latter discuss, and reject, the thesis of Gibert (1997) that Euripides' surviving *Hippolytus* (*Stephanephoros*) was actually produced earlier than his lost *Hippolytus* (*Kalyptomenos*).

²⁴ Euripides' play was produced in 412 BC (schol. Ar. *Frogs* 53); artistic evidence suggests that Sophocles' play dates from about 450 BC [see Green/Handley (1995) 39–40].

²⁵ Sophocles' play is generally dated ca. 442 BC (Griffith 1999, 1–2); Euripides' play is datable on metrical grounds to 420 BC or later.

²⁶ See my discussion in Sommerstein et al. (2006) 20–21.

²⁷ Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis* was produced posthumously (schol. Ar. *Frogs* 67).

²⁸ Sophocles' play is generally dated to the 430s or 420s BC; Euripides' play is datable on metrical grounds to 414 BC or later.

²⁹ See my discussion in Sommerstein et al. (2006) 65–66.

³⁰ *Alexandros*, *Creusa/Ion*, *The Prophets/Polyidus*, *Palamedes*.

³¹ *Aegeus* [see Hahnemann (2003) 210–211].

³² On this see Sommerstein (2004) 45.

³³ These two plays are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

be buried.³⁴ In *Teucer*, as in *Philoctetes*, he introduced a totally unexpected character, this time Odysseus, who apparently had a crucial influence on the outcome.

In *Phaëdra*, where his precursor was Euripides, Sophocles used a different method. By changing the assumed initial situation (having Theseus be long absent and believed dead)³⁵ he transforms the moral parameters of the story and greatly diminishes Phaëdra's guilt; this change also raises issues of a political kind (such as the question of who will now govern Athens, Theseus' legitimate sons being too young to do so) which probably had some prominence in the play.³⁶

The material that survives from most lost Sophoclean tragedies is so scanty or so uninformative that we can do little more than identify the mythical episode which they dramatize—and sometimes even that is beyond us. A play called *Priam*, of which there survive five fragments amounting to six words, could be about any number of episodes before or during the Trojan War; a tiny clue is provided by one of the fragments (fr. 532) which mentions the practice of abandoning unwanted infants in pots, but even if this does refer to the exposure of Paris, we have no way of knowing whether this was part of the plot, or whether it was treated as an important antecedent event, or whether the reference was a merely casual one. There are perhaps 35 or 40 lost Sophoclean plays of which we can say with some approach to confidence (i) that they were tragedies rather than satyr-dramas and (ii) at least to a first approximation, how Sophocles shaped the relevant mythical episode into a plot compatible with the conventions of Athenian tragedy. They are tabulated below.³⁷

³⁴ I argue in Sommerstein et al. (2012) 112–127 [cf. earlier Jouan (1966) 340–345; Scodel (1980) 52–53] that this story (Servius on Virg. *Aen.* 2.81) is derived from Sophocles.

³⁵ Soph. fr. 686, 687, 687a.

³⁶ Cf. Soph. fr. 683; see Talbot/Sommerstein in Sommerstein et al. (2006) 282.

³⁷ Considerations of space have compelled me to be dogmatic in my plot-summaries (and in identifying pairs of titles for single plays). There are brief discussions of all the plays in Lloyd-Jones (1996), Radt (1999), and Jouanna (2007) 609–675, and somewhat fuller ones in Pearson (1917) and Lucas de Dios (1983). Plays marked with * or ** in the table have been edited by Sommerstein et al. (2006) and (2012) respectively; I have provided some bibliographical updates for plays in the 2006 volume, and mentioned key recent studies of some of those in the 2012 volume. Plays marked with † have been discussed, and their papyrus fragments edited, by Carden (1974). For other plays, where possible, one or more significant recent studies are mentioned.

<i>Athamas I or II</i>	The treachery of Athamas' wife Ino, who bribed envoys sent to the Delphic oracle, leads to the (supposed) sacrifice of her stepsons, Phrixus and Helle; Athamas is saved from death on being told his children are alive
<i>Ajax the Locrian</i> (<i>Aias Lokros</i>) (Fitzpatrick 2003)	The gross sacrilege of Ajax son of Oileus, in seizing Cassandra from the temple of Athena, goes unpunished; divine retribution is probably threatened and/or prophesied
<i>The Ethiopians</i> (<i>Aithiopes</i>) or <i>Memnon</i>	Memnon's last fight and death at the hands of Achilles
<i>The Sons of Aleos</i> (<i>Aleadaí</i>)	Telephus kills his mother's brothers, the sons of Aleos (because they insulted him over his illegitimate birth and poverty?)
<i>Alexandros</i>	Paris, who was exposed as a baby and brought up as a shepherd, is restored to his family (not to its advantage)
<i>Andromeda</i> (Klimek-Winter 1993, 23–54)	The boastfulness of Cassiopeia provokes Poseidon's anger and leads to the sacrifice of her daughter Andromeda, who is rescued from the sea-monster by Perseus
<i>The Demand for Helen</i> (<i>Helenês Apaitêsis</i>)	The demand by a Greek embassy for Helen's return refused (except, presumably, by Antenor); divine punishment is prophesied (and/or human revenge threatened?)
<i>The Epigoni</i> or <i>Eriphyle</i> ** (see also Mülke 2007)	Alcmeon, bound by his father's injunction and an oracular command to kill his mother Eriphyle in revenge for the death of his father Amphiaraus, and further motivated when he learns that she had taken a bribe to force him to lead the second Argive expedition against Thebes, kills her on his victorious return; he is driven mad, and goes into exile
<i>Hermione or The Women of Phthia</i> (<i>Phthiotides</i>) *	Neoptolemus brings his unwilling bride Hermione home to Argos, and then goes to Delphi meaning to plunder and burn the temple in revenge for Achilles' death; he is killed there, and Orestes, who was previously betrothed to Hermione, takes her home to Argos/Mycenae
<i>Euryalus</i>	Odysseus is deceived by Penelope into unwittingly killing his illegitimate son Euryalus
<i>Eurypylus</i> † (see also Ozbek 2006)	The last fight of Eurypylus, son of Telephus, and his death at the hands of Neoptolemus; he is lamented by his mother Astyoche (sister of Priam), who had been bribed to persuade him to go to war

<i>Thamyras</i> (Meriani 2007)	The supremely skilled singer Thamyras, who had boasted himself superior to the Muses, is deprived of his skills by them, and probably of his sight as well
<i>Thyestes I</i> (' <i>Thyestes at Sicyon</i> ') (Vermeule 1987, 122–129; Sommerstein 2006, 241–242)	Thyestes' incestuous baby Aegisthus (the offspring of his rape of his daughter Pelopeia) is exposed (but it is not clear which phase of the ensuing story was dramatized)
<i>Thyestes II or III</i> (<i>'Thyestes or Atreus'</i>)	Thyestes, returning from exile, is tricked by his brother Atreus into eating his children's flesh
<i>Iphigeneia</i>	Clytaemestra is deceived into sending her daughter to Aulis (it is not clear whether she is later told about the sacrifice, nor, if so, <i>what</i> she is told)
<i>The Men of Camicus</i> (<i>Kamikioi</i>) (Zacharia 2003, 67–73)	Cocalus and his daughters protect their guest Daedalus by killing Minos when he comes to Camicus (Sicily) to demand Daedalus' surrender
<i>The Women of Colchis</i> (<i>Kolchides</i>)	Medea helps Jason win the Golden Fleece— <i>inter alia</i> by murdering her brother
<i>The Laconian Women</i> (<i>Lakainai</i>)	Odysseus and Diomedes, secretly entering Troy, gain possession of the Palladium (by persuading the priestess Theano?) but then quarrel over it
<i>Laocoon</i> (Scafoglio 2006)	After the Wooden Horse is taken into Troy, the two sons of the priest Laocoon, and perhaps also their father, are devoured by a pair of gigantic serpents; Laocoon's brother Anchises, seeing in this the fulfilment of a prophecy given him by Aphrodite and an omen of Troy's fall, persuades his son Aeneas to flee the city with him, their family and others, ³⁸ while the rest of the Trojans continue to celebrate their supposed release from peril
<i>The Men of Larisa</i> (<i>Larisaioi</i>)	Perseus, reunited with his grandfather Acrisius and about to take him home to Argos, ³⁹ kills him accidentally with a discus throw
<i>The Prophets</i> (<i>Manteis</i>) <i>or Polyidus</i> ⁴⁰	The prophet Polyidus discovers the body of Minos' missing young son Glaucus and restores him to life

³⁸ For the prophecy, see Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.48.2; for the relationship between Anchises and Laocoon, Hyg. *Fab.* 135.

³⁹ Cf. Pherecydes fr. 12 Fowler.

⁴⁰ It is possible that this was a satyr-drama.

<i>The Mysians (Mysoi)</i> (see below)	Telephus, in exile for the murder of his uncles, comes to Mysia in search of his mother Auge. He defeats an enemy of King Teuthras, who rewards him with the hand of his 'daughter'—who is in fact Auge. Loyal to her old lover Heracles, she attempts to murder her new husband, but is miraculously prevented from doing so, and a mother-son recognition follows
<i>The Arrival of Nauplius</i> (<i>Nauplios Katapleon</i>)**	Nauplius comes to Troy seeking justice for the death of his son Palamedes, is rebuffed, and departs 'making threats against the Achaeans'
<i>Nauplius and the Beacon</i> (<i>Nauplios Pyrkaeus</i>)** (see also Marshall 2003)	Nauplius wrecks the Greek fleet, and simultaneously Athena destroys the lesser Ajax
<i>Niobe</i> **†	Boastful Niobe's sons, then her husband (who challenged Apollo to a fight), then her daughters (all but one), are killed by Apollo and Artemis
<i>Odysseus and the Fatal Spine</i> (<i>Odysseus Akanthoplex</i>)	Odysseus is killed by his son Telegonus (with a spear tipped by a fish-spine), neither knowing who the other is; Odysseus, after an oracular warning, had probably supposed that any danger to him would come from Telemachus, and was taking precautions accordingly
<i>Oenomaus</i> **	Pelops wins Hippodameia from the barbarous Oenomaus—probably thanks to Hippodameia herself, who was in love with him and who suborned her father's charioteer Myrtilus; we do not know whether the play included subsequent events leading to Myrtilus' death
<i>Palamedes</i> **	Odysseus, who has deep though unjustified grudges against Palamedes, contrives his judicial murder by forging and planting evidence and then making a treacherous 'defence' speech
<i>Peleus</i>	Neoptolemus rescues his grandfather Peleus (and kills the sons of the latter's persecutor Acastus?)
<i>The Shepherds</i> (<i>Poimenes</i>)**	The boastful Cycnus, coming to help the Trojans on the first day of the war, kills Protesilaus and is then himself killed by Achilles
<i>Polyxena</i> *	Polyxena, daughter of Priam, is sacrificed at the demand of Achilles' ghost, after disputes between Agamemnon and Menelaus and (probably) between Neoptolemus and Polyxena

<i>The Scyrians (Skyrioi)</i> †	Neoptolemus, invited by Odysseus and Phoenix to join the army at Troy, by determination (reinforced by persuasion and/or deception) overcomes the opposition of his mother Deidameia and his grandfather Lycomedes
<i>The Diners (Syndeipnoi) or The Assembly of the Achaeans (Achaiôn Syllogos)*</i>	At a banquet at Tenedos, in sight of the Troad, a quarrel flares up between Odysseus and Achilles, and is about to lead to bloodshed when Thetis reconciles them
<i>Teucer</i>	Telamon, probably influenced by the arguments of Odysseus, banishes Teucer for failing to bring Ajax home
<i>Tereus*</i> (see also Casanova 2003; Monella 2005, 79–125; Liapis 2006, 2008; Milo 2008)	Procne and her sister Philomela kill Procne's young son Itys, and serve up his flesh to his father Tereus, in revenge for Tereus' rape and mutilation of Philomela
<i>Troilus*</i>	Troilus is killed and savagely mutilated by Achilles, after blocking both Achilles' and Sarpedon's offers to marry Polyxena because he was in love with her himself
<i>Tyro II**</i>	Tyro is reunited with her long-lost sons Neleus and Pelias, who kill their persecuting stepmother Sidero
<i>Phaedra*</i>	Phaedra, rebuffed by Hippolytus (at a time when Theseus is believed dead), causes his death (after Theseus' unexpected return) through a false accusation of rape, but her guilt is discovered (by her own remorseful confession?) and she commits suicide

Almost all these plays exhibit one or more of a rather small set of story motifs which also appear in extant plays by Sophocles and the other great tragedians. About a quarter of them are examples of the classic *hamartia* plot⁴¹ (Arist. *Poet.* 1453a7–23, 1453b29–36, 1454a2–10): a horrific act (usually the killing of close kin, but sometimes incest, human sacrifice, or the like), either committed or averted just in time, and caused either by ignorance (as in *Oedipus Tyrannus*) or by third-party deception (as in *Trachiniae*). Horrific acts are committed as a result of deception in *Euryalus*, *Thyestes II/III*, *Iphigeneia*, *Tereus*, and *Phaedra*, of innocent ignorance in *Odysseus and the Fatal Spine*, and in a different way in *The Men of Larisa*, where Perseus, as he shaped for his discus throw, was apparently unaware that another man

⁴¹ On the meaning of *hamartia* in Aristotle, see Lucas (1968) 299–307.

was standing very close to him (fr. 380); they are narrowly avoided in the *Athamas* play and in *The Mysians*.

Other common story elements include the following:

The wicked stepmother (cf. Eur. *Hippolytus*): *Athamas* (Ino), *Euryalus* (Penelope), *Tyro* (Sidero), *Phaedra*

Bastardy (cf., again, Eur. *Hippolytus*): *The Sons of Aleos* (Telephus), *Euryalus*, *Odysseus and the Fatal Spine* (Telegonus), *Teucer*, *Phaedra* (*Hippolytus*)

Incest (cf. *Oedipus Tyrannus*): *Thyestes at Sicyon*, *The Mysians* (Telephus/Auge), *Troilus*

Human sacrifice (cf. Eur. *Hecuba* and his two *Iphigeneia* plays): *Athamas*, *Andromeda*, *Iphigeneia*, *Polyxena*

The revenge of an injured or insulted deity (cf. *Ajax*): *Ajax the Locrian* (Athena), *Andromeda* (Poseidon), *Thamyrras* (the Muses), *Nauplius and the Beacon* (Athena), *Niobe* (Apollo and Artemis)

The revenge of an injured or insulted mortal (cf. *Ajax*, *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, *Oedipus at Colonus*): *The Sons of Aleos* (Telephus), *The Epigoni* (Alcmeon), both *Nauplius* plays, *The Diners* (Achilles and/or Odysseus), *Tereus* (Procne and Philomela), *Phaedra*

Identification of a child not seen since infancy (cf. *Oedipus Tyrannus*): *Alexandros*, *Euryalus*, *The Mysians* (Telephus), *Odysseus and the Fatal Spine* (Telegonus), *Tyro* (Neleus and Pelias)

Rescue of the imperilled or persecuted (cf. Eur. *Alcestis*, *Andromache*, *Heracles*): *Athamas* (Phrixus, Helle, and Athamas himself), *Andromeda*, *The Men of Camicus* (Daedalus), *Peleus*, *Tyro*

Women married against their will (cf. *Trachiniae*): *Hermione*, *The Mysians* (Auge), *Tereus* (Procne); in all these cases the woman appears to have been presented sympathetically, even when like Auge and Procne she uses deliberate murderous violence

Women bribed to injure husband or son: *The Epigoni* (Eriphyle, twice), *Eurypylos* (Astyoche)

Women committing murder for love: *The Women of Colchis* (Medea), *Oenomaus* (Hippodameia, by proxy) and, in the scorned lover's revenge, *Phaedra*

Destruction of the cruel (cf. Eur. *Heracles*): *The Men of Camicus* (Minos), *Oenomaus*, *Peleus* (Acastus or his sons), *Tereus*, *Tyro* (Sidero)

The failure of would-be saviours of Troy (cf. [Eur.] *Rhesus*): *The Ethiopians* (Memnon), *Eurypylos*, *The Shepherds* (Cycnus)

Quarrels among leaders during the Trojan expedition (cf. *Ajax*): *The Laconian Women* (Odysseus/Diomedes), *Palamedes* (Odysseus/Palamedes), *Polyxena* (Agamemnon/Menelaus), *The Diners* (Odysseus/Achilles)

I will end by more closely examining three plays covering between them a range of saga-cycles and story-patterns.

The Diners (*Syndeipnoi*)⁴²—which I believe to be identical with *The Gathering of the Achaeans* (*Achaiôn Syllogos*)—is built on a combination of two

⁴² I offer a more extended and evidenced discussion of this play in Sommerstein et al. (2006) 84–140.

stories, from the *Odyssey* and the *Cypria* respectively, about quarrels among the leaders of the Achaean army near the beginning of the Trojan campaign: one between Achilles and Odysseus at a sacrificial feast (location and cause unspecified), and one between Achilles and Agamemnon at Tenedos, caused by Agamemnon's failure to invite Achilles, or at least his late invitation, which Achilles perceived as an insult.

The scene takes place outside the quarters of Agamemnon at Tenedos. It is evening (this was one of the few Greek dramas whose action is imagined as taking place entirely at night). A prologue, possibly spoken by Nestor, makes the geographical and chronological setting clear to the audience: most of the leaders, he will have said, are already in Agamemnon's quarters where a banquet is to be held, but some are apparently still at sea (fr. 143), in particular Ajax and Achilles. Ajax then arrives; he is very pleased to learn about the feast (fr. 563) and is rebuked for this by Nestor (fr. 564); he reacts angrily but is soothed by Nestor (fr. 855)⁴³ and goes inside. Achilles will not be so easily placated.

This is a likely moment for the choral *parodos*; the Chorus probably consisted of soldiers summoned to guard the building. Nestor may have remained onstage; Agamemnon presently comes out to join him, and asks what should be done about Achilles' failure to turn up for the agreed rendezvous. Nestor suggests that the banquet be held without him, but that no attention be drawn to his absence; Agamemnon should call the roll, not of those who mustered at Aulis, but of those who joined in the oath of Helen's suitors—a list on which Achilles' name would not appear (fr. 144). Agamemnon agrees, and they go inside; the banquet can now begin.

Then Nestor's ingenious idea goes wrong, as his ingenious ideas sometimes do in Homer—because Achilles arrives after all, presumably with an explanation (which, at this stage, only the Chorus hear) of his delay. He goes inside, a choral ode follows—and then comes an explosion. Odysseus bursts out of the building and narrates the quarrel. Initially it was between Achilles and Agamemnon, Achilles being angry that the banquet had begun without him (Philodemus, *On Anger* col. 18.17–24). The argument escalated, like that in the *Iliad*, and Achilles may have railed at the company generally. Odysseus must then have intervened, in a manner that Achilles found particularly insulting, and Achilles picked up the nearest chamber-pot and flung it at Odysseus (fr. 565). Just as Odysseus' narrative ends, Achilles

⁴³ Cited simply from Sophocles without specifying a play, but stated to have been spoken by Nestor to Ajax.

too comes outside, in search of him, and the quarrel continues onstage. Odysseus taunts Achilles with cowardice (fr. 566), Achilles says he is going to sail straight home (Plut. *Mor.* 74b) and, like so many of Odysseus' enemies, taunts him that his real father was not Laertes but the villainous Sisyphus (fr. 567). We do not know precisely how things then developed, but we can be certain that they boiled up into a situation in which someone's life was in danger, probably that of Achilles. At any rate, Achilles' divine mother Thetis 'rushes' to intervene (fr. 562). She must have reconciled the quarrelling chiefs and safeguarded Achilles, most likely by revealing that if he did not fight against Troy, the city would never fall; she probably also assured Odysseus and Agamemnon that Achilles' glory would not diminish theirs. All the same, the play prefigures in many ways the graver quarrel in the *Iliad*; that quarrel too ended in a reconciliation, but only after many Achaean lives had been lost, including crucially that of Patroclus, and after Achilles, by vowing to kill Hector, had made his own early death inevitable. The play has been thought to be a satyr-drama, but there is no evidence for a Chorus of satyrs, and the one surviving choral fragment (fr. 568, in praise of fame) would be quite inappropriate to them. On the other hand, some of the language and content of our fragments has often been thought below the dignity of tragedy, and at least one expression, the reference to Nestor's bald forehead (fr. 144a), would be without parallel in the genre, where old men are often white-haired but never bald. If *The Diners* was neither a regular tragedy nor a satyr-drama, it can only have been a play of the type of *Alcestis*, a tragedy with a happy ending and some light as well as serious features produced as a substitute for a satyr-drama.

The Mysians (*Mysoi*), like Aeschylus' play of the same name, was concerned with the journey of Telephus from his home city, Tegea, to Mysia in Asia Minor in search of his mother. Telephus was the son of Heracles and Auge, daughter of Aleos, King of Tegea. He had quarrelled with and killed his uncles, the sons of Aleos, a story which was the subject of Sophocles' *The Sons of Aleos*; *The Mysians* probably followed it in the same production (Sophocles is known to have produced a series of plays called the *Telepheia*).⁴⁴ The fragments are very scanty, but Hyginus (*Fab.* 100) offers a story clearly suitable for tragedy (indeed we know from Aelian⁴⁵ that it *did* form the plot of a tragedy), and when Hyginus follows a tragic source it is usually Sophocles or Euripides rather than Aeschylus. This is the story.

⁴⁴ IG ii² 3091.8.

⁴⁵ Ael. *NA* 3.47.

Telephus had been instructed by an oracle that he would find his mother in Mysia; accordingly he had come there, accompanied by his friend Parthenopaeus—who seems to have been added to the story so that Telephus, who as a polluted homicide was forbidden to speak himself (cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1460a32), could have someone to speak on his behalf. Presumably (although Hyginus does not mention this) he supplicated the local king, Teuthras, for purification, and was granted it. Teuthras' kingdom was then under attack by one Idas, and Teuthras—who had no son, and must have been an old man—offered his kingdom, and the hand of his daughter, to Telephus if he could defeat Idas. His 'daughter' was in fact an adopted child, and was none other than Auge, and in most other accounts Teuthras had taken her as his *wife* when she came to Mysia.⁴⁶ Telephus, with Parthenopaeus' help, did defeat Idas, and Teuthras gave him the promised reward. Auge, whose opinion on the matter had not been sought (or else had been overruled), was determined that no man but Heracles should ever possess her body, and on the wedding night, Danaid-like, she concealed a sword in her chamber. She was on the point of killing her bridegroom when a great serpent suddenly appeared to protect him. At this Auge dropped her sword; Telephus was about to kill *her* in retaliation when she appealed in desperation to 'Heracles my ravisher', and in this way the two discovered that they were mother and son. Hyginus ends his tale by saying that Telephus took his mother back to his own country, but this cannot be taken as meaning that he himself returned permanently to Tegea, since he needed to be the King of Mysia in order to play his well-known role in the preliminaries to the Trojan War.

One might think that any dramatization of this story would have to cover only its closing phases, telling the rest by retrospective narrative, and when we discover that Sophocles' play included the arrival in Mysia of a foreigner from Europe (fr. 411)—undoubtedly Telephus or his companion—we might suppose that this rules out Hyginus' story as a plot for Sophocles' play. But in fact it is not uncommon for the action of a tragedy to encompass a short military campaign, even some distance away from the dramatic location; this happens in Euripides' *Suppliants*, and probably happened in Sophocles' *Epigoni*.⁴⁷ Nothing else in the fragments is inconsistent with Hyginus' story, and fr. 412, which says that something (we do not know what) was accompanied by a great deal of music played on Asian instruments, may well come from a description of the wedding feast. Among extant plays this

⁴⁶ e.g. Euripides, *Auge* (Strabo 13.1.69); [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 3.9.1.

⁴⁷ See my discussion in Sommerstein et al. (2012) 26–52.

plot would most resemble that of Euripides' *Ion*, where also a mother and son each attempt to kill the other before discovering their relationship; but the motif of averted incest is, so far as we know, unique—though a character in Menander's *Epitrepontes* (341–342) does refer to a story in which 'a man about to marry his sister avoided doing so thanks to recognition-tokens', something which occurs in Menander's own *Perikeiromene* though not in any known tragic or other version of a myth.

One would greatly like to know, firstly what was said, and between whom, about the planned marriage before it took place, and secondly how the climax of the play, with the two attempted murders and the recognition, was staged. On the first question, we can be certain that Telephus was not told the name of his bride, and fairly certain that they did not meet onstage before the wedding. It would, however, be desirable that the audience should know in advance that Auge was opposed to the marriage; this could easily be managed by creating a scene between her and her adoptive father in which she raised objections to it and/or voiced her determination to remain celibate.

The bedroom scene, and the appearance of the serpent, must of course have been reported in narrative, not presented onstage, and the narrator must have been either Telephus or Auge, since no one else witnessed the events. As it was Auge who was terrified by the serpent, one would expect that it would be Auge who fled from the chamber. In reality Telephus would have arrived almost immediately in pursuit, but time in Greek drama is regularly suspended, as it were, in order for narratives to be heard by the audience. Auge, then, will have told Chorus and audience what had happened in the chamber; the story would make little sense unless she confessed to her plot, and no doubt she did so—the appearance of the serpent will have made her aware that she had been acting contrary to the will of superhuman powers. Then Telephus would appear, probably wielding the sword Auge had dropped and determined to kill her with it, until her appeal to Heracles led to an onstage recognition. Such a pattern would bear a broad resemblance to what occurs in *Ion*, where Creusa's attempt to poison Ion (which took place in public, at a feast) is narrated by a messenger (1106–1228), after which she herself appears, takes refuge at an altar, and is confronted by Ion, who is about to kill her when the Pythia enters and gives him the cradle in which he first came to Delphi, which contains the evidence that enables Creusa to recognize that she is his mother (1320–1444). We cannot tell whether Auge too took refuge at an altar, or whether tokens of some kind were used to confirm that Telephus was her son.

The story of Niobe, whose boasting about her children angered Apollo and Artemis with the result that the two deities slew all of them (or in some versions, as we shall see, all but one), was famously dramatized by Aeschylus, who chose to present only the aftermath of the disaster, beginning with Niobe sitting long silent in her grief.⁴⁸ Sophocles' play,⁴⁹ our knowledge of which has been considerably increased by papyrus fragments (including substantial parts of a hypothesis),⁵⁰ by contrast focused on the catastrophe itself, part of which was ingeniously presented onstage, or virtually onstage (compare Sophocles' treatment of Ajax's suicide or of the killing of Clytaemestra).

The Sophoclean Niobe had fourteen children, seven sons and seven daughters (fr. 446), and was in the habit of boasting that they excelled the children of Leto (in number, presumably).⁵¹ She repeated this boast, apparently onstage, when sending the boys off to hunt. And while they were out hunting, Apollo shot them; one of the boys appealed to his lover for protection (fr. 448) but, inevitably, in vain. All this must have been reported by a messenger to Niobe and/or her husband Amphion; fr. 443 was apparently part of his narrative. Amphion's reaction, according to a plausible restoration of the hypothesis, was to challenge Apollo to a fight, with the result that he too was killed. Then it was the turn of the daughters inside the palace—and here Sophocles produced one of the most spectacular *coups de théâtre* ever seen on the Athenian stage, in a scene from which several fragments have fortunately survived (fr. 441a, 442, 444). Apollo and Artemis are apparently on the roof of the house; Artemis has her bow, and Apollo is directing her where to shoot. He points to a 'frightened one' trying to hide, alone, among the storage jars and corn-bins, and urges Artemis to shoot her quickly. This may be the last surviving daughter, Chloris (also called Meliboea), who in several accounts escapes the slaughter and eventually becomes the wife of Neleus.⁵² The Chorus-leader wonders whether to go inside and rescue her, and a moment later a cry is heard from the girl herself ('I beg you, Queen ... do not shoot an arrow and kill me!') Finally the terrified maiden rushes out of the house, 'like a colt released from the yoke'; she at least has been saved.

⁴⁸ Aesch. fr. 154a; Ar. *Frogs* 911–920.

⁴⁹ Cf. Sommerstein et al. (2012) 127–128.

⁵⁰ *POxy* 3653 fr. 1.7–20 and 2 col. i 1–27.

⁵¹ So Hyginus *Fab.* 9, who is probably following Sophocles (he goes on to mention that Niobe's sons were killed while hunting).

⁵² Telesilla *PMG* 721; [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 3.5.6; Hyg. *Fab.* 9; Paus. 2.21.9–10 (citing the Argives' account, which he rejects).

The last event mentioned in the Hypothesis is the arrival of Zethus, Amphion's brother, who takes certain actions in regard to Niobe and also in regard to someone else—presumably Chloris, the only other surviving member of the family. In almost every version of the story Niobe, after the disaster, is taken to her old home in Lydia, and an ancient commentator on the *Iliad* confirms that this happened in Sophocles' version;⁵³ Zethus may have taken Chloris under his own protection or may have arranged for her to be sent to Neleus. Perhaps it was to Zethus that Niobe reflected on her sufferings and sorrows in a speech in which she sadly recalled (fr. 447) that she 'was dear to one [evidently Zeus, father of her father Tantalus] who was mightier than these [Apollo and Artemis]'.

The reader may have noticed that one element which has often dominated discussion of Sophoclean drama has not been mentioned at all in this chapter: the figure of the 'Sophoclean hero' (or heroine) who stands upright and obstinate against all the storms of circumstance in a noble, if sometimes foolhardy, refusal to yield or compromise (cf. Knox 1964). Such a figure, it is generally agreed, appears in six of the seven surviving Sophoclean tragedies; yet there is no clear example of one among the fragmentary plays. Is this merely because it is difficult to determine whether a character falls within this type when, as is usually the case, we possess only tiny scraps of what is said in the play by, to or about any given character? Is it that our surviving selection is a biased one, perhaps because characters of this kind had a particularly strong appeal to those responsible for the selection? Or might the concept of the 'Sophoclean hero', even in the surviving plays, itself rest on insecure foundations? At any rate, the mismatch should serve as a warning that no generalization about Sophocles based only on seven out of 123 plays can be regarded as a safe one. Really to know Sophocles one must know the fragments too.

⁵³ Schol. (T) *Il.* 24.602.

THE SATYR PLAYS OF SOPHOCLES

Bernd Seidensticker

In the heyday of the ancient Greek theatre each of the three poets who were elected to participate in the tragic contest at the most important Athenian theatre contest, the City or Great Dionysia, had to present not only three tragedies but also a satyr play.

The large number of plays that are attested for Sophocles suggests that, over the course of the six decades in which he wrote plays, he produced no fewer than 30 satyr plays.¹ In the book fragments, however, only thirteen plays are identified as satyr plays.² Since we know the titles of almost all of Sophocles' works, the missing satyr plays must be hidden among the preserved titles.³ The generic term *satyroi* or *satyrikós/ê*, which in the official records of the performances was added to the title, appears not to have been an indispensable component of the title. In the catalogue of Aeschylus' plays, which probably traces back to Callimachus' *Pinaces*, only one of the poet's ten certain satyr plays, *Circe*, is classified as such;⁴ in most cases where we possess more than one book fragment of a satyr play, only one of the authors who preserve the fragments adds the information that he is quoting from a satyr play.

The title alone rarely tells us that a given play was a satyr play. Some titles, however, offer indirect clues: we may suspect a satyr play when its title suggests the birth or upbringing of a god or hero, such as *Heracleiscus* or *Dionysiscus*. And since tragedians did not use abstract terms as titles, we may assume that not only *Crisis*, *Momus*, and *Hybris*—for which have explicit testimonia—but also *Eris* were satyr plays.⁵ Furthermore, since the satyrs

¹ *TrGF* T 1, 76 f. (*Vita*); 130; T 2, 9 (*Suda*) 123.

² In the cases of *Kedalion* and *Momus* the explicit identification hinges on conjectures of the titles in one of the book fragments (*Kedalion* fr. 328; *Momus* fr. 424).

³ Cf. the list in Radt (1982) 217 f.

⁴ *TrGF* III T 78, l. 8.

⁵ Pearson (1917) l. 139 and Sutton (1974) 133 believe that *Eris* was a tragedy. But besides the title the tone of the only fragment suggests that it was a satyr play: 'I (fem.) again look hungrily at the cakes' (fr. 199); Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 390 f.

and their old father Silenus are obligatory elements of the genre, we can be certain that plays in which their presence is testified were satyr plays.⁶ Thus we know that *The Lovers of Achilles* (*Achilleôs Erastai*; cf. fr. 153), the so-called *Oeneus* play (fr. 1130) and probably also *Helen's Wedding* (*Helenês Gamos*)⁷ were satyr plays. Indications of this genre can also be seen in typical motifs and themes (as in the case of *Daedalus* and *Cerberus*⁸) and in the metre,⁹ language, and style of a fragment.¹⁰ In particular, we can expect colloquial, scatological, and obscene words and phrases. Opinions as to what is possible in tragedy differ widely. But if there is reason to believe that a certain play could be a satyr play, linguistic and stylistic observations can help to confirm our suspicion.

With the help of these criteria and considerations we can establish the following lists of (a) certain, (b) probable, and (c) possible Sophoclean satyr plays:

- a) Certain: *The Lovers of Achilles* (*Achilleôs Erastai*), *Amycus*, *Amphiarëus*, *Dionysiscus*, (*Heracles*) *At Taenarum* (*Epi Tainaro*), *Heracleiscus*, *Heraclides*, *Hybris*, *Trackers* (*Ichneutae*), *Cedalion*, *The Judgement* (*Krisis*), *The Dumb Ones* (*Kôphoi*), *Momus*, *Oeneus* play, *Salmones*.¹¹
- b) Probable: *Admetus*, *Daedalus*, *The Strife* (*Eris*), *Nausicaa*, *Helen's Wedding* (*Helenês Gamos*), *Inachus*, *Cerberus*, *Pandora* or *Hammerers* (*Sphyrokopoi*).¹²

⁶ Cf. e.g. Aesch. *Isthmiassthae* and *Dictyulci*.

⁷ The orator Aristides (46, 307, 14; cf. Radt, *TrGF* III, 181), in a comparison of philosophers with satyrs, says that the satyrs in a play by Sophocles were overcome by lust when they saw Helen. But his words prove that *Helene's Gamos* was a satyr play only if he had this play in mind.

⁸ Satyr-drama is a genre of recurrent typical themes and motifs; cf. Guggisberg (1941) 60–74; Seidensticker (1979) 243–247; Sutton (1980) 145–159; Seaford (1984) 33–44; Lämmle (2011) 323–380.

⁹ There are a number of respects in which the trimeter of satyr drama deviates from that of tragedy: comic anapaests (resolution of breve or anceps outside the first foot and not in names); breach of Porson's law (no word-ending after a long third anceps) and three consecutive tribrachs; the trimeters of *Ichneutae*, however, are (almost) indistinguishable from tragedy (one first foot anapaest: 230; four violations of Porson's law: 114, 120, 341, 353; in addition the play contains iambic trimeters (298–329), which are not found in tragedy or comedy).

¹⁰ Cf. p. 235.

¹¹ For different lists, see Radt (1982) 190n7.

¹² Many other plays have been nominated as potential candidates.

- c) Possible: *Athamas, The Water-Carriers (Hydrophoroi)*, *Iambe*,¹³ *Phineus A or B, The Shepherds (Poimenes)*,¹⁴ *The Diners (Syndeipnoi*¹⁵ or *Syndeipnon)*.¹⁶

1. *The Plays—Subject Matter and Themes*

Until the early twentieth century we only had book fragments, which often consist of a single word and seldom of more than one or two lines. It was the publication of a good part of *Ichneutae* in 1912 which provided us with a lively picture of the Sophoclean satyr play.

The roughly 450 lines will have been approximately half of the play,¹⁷ which presents two episodes in the childhood of Hermes, god of thieves, well known from the Homeric hymn to Hermes: the crafty theft of Apollo's cattle and the invention of the lyre. In the hymn these achievements are juxtaposed without any connection: first the invention of the lyre and then the theft of the cattle. By turning the sequence around and introducing the satyrs into the story Sophocles devised an entertaining dramatic narrative.¹⁸

The scene is Mount Cyllene. The theft has already occurred, and the play opens with the appearance of Apollo, who has been searching for his cattle for quite some time and who has finally arrived in the mountains of Arcadia. In a public proclamation he calls for help and offers as reward some gold,¹⁹ to which he adds, when Silenus and the satyrs appear, the promise of freedom. In the preserved text there is no indication as to whom the satyrs serve as slaves.²⁰ His identity is presumably established in the lost second half of

¹³ Cf. Sutton (1975) 245–248.

¹⁴ Cf. n30.

¹⁵ Cf. n30.

¹⁶ Redondo (2003) lists several more: *Andromeda, Danae, Troilus, Tympanistae*. In all these cases—as in most of the cases listed above under ‘possible’—it is the linguistic/stylistic quality of one or more fragments that carries the burden of proof.

¹⁷ Satyr plays appear to have been shorter than tragedies: Aesch. *Dict.* ca. 850 lines; Eur. *Cyc.* 709.

¹⁸ For the other differences between the Hymn and Sophocles' version of the story, cf. Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 310.

¹⁹ Cf. (44), 51, 78, 156.

²⁰ None of the three suggestions is without problems: Apollo (Pearson 1917, l.232 f.): Why should Apollo, if he were their master, not simply order them to search for his cattle? Pan (Siegmann 1941, 46–54; Seaford 1984, 34 f.): Pan lives in Arcadia and sometimes appears in the entourage of Dionysus. But is he ever the master of the satyrs? Dionysus (Robert 1912, 550 ff.; Lloyd-Jones 1996, 142): Could Apollo offer them freedom from their regular servitude to his brother?

the play. The satyrs are enthusiastic about the promised reward and set to work immediately. Because of their sniffing and snooping around like a pack of hounds the play is named *Ichneutae* (*Trackers*). The confusion which results from Hermes' cunning manipulation of the cattle's trail increases considerably when mysterious sounds are suddenly heard, throwing the satyrs into a state of panic.²¹ Silenus, who has apparently watched them from some distance, accuses his sons of fear and takes over the control of the search, but dashes off as soon as he hears the sounds himself. The satyrs, who, despite their fear, want to get to the bottom of the mystery, then begin a wild dance to drive the hidden noise-maker out of his hiding. The unexpected result of their dancing is that the nymph Cyllene appears; she scolds them for their unseemly behaviour, but finally, having been appeased by the satyrs, tells them that she is taking care of the child that Zeus has begotten with Maia, the daughter of Atlas. When she mentions in passing that Hermes, who has miraculously grown up within a matter of days, used gut and hide to build the instrument which caused the sounds, the satyrs get the decisive clue: the cattle-thief and the inventor of the lyre must be one and the same. Unfortunately it is here, right in the middle of the conversation between Cyllene and the satyrs, that the papyrus breaks off. Nevertheless, it is possible to reconstruct the missing second half of the play: the satyrs must have informed Apollo, and, naturally, the play must have ended with a confrontation of the divine brothers and their eventual reconciliation, in the course of which Apollo will have received the lyre and the satyrs (and Silenus?) their reward.

Ichneutae features a number of the most common topoi of satyr play:²² the birth and youth of a god, slavery and liberation of the satyrs and Silenus, a marvellous invention, theft and trickery, the solving of a riddle.

The only other Sophoclean satyr play of which we possess larger pieces is *Inachus*, a play which, as the large number of book fragments indicates, was quite popular in antiquity.²³ The two papyri, which preserve parts of two scenes and a few lines from a third, are both badly damaged and present complex problems. On the one hand it is certain neither that both belong to the same play nor that this play was the *Inachus* of Sophocles;²⁴ and on the

²¹ Cf. p. 235.

²² Cf. n30.

²³ The popularity of the play is shown also by the fact that Aristophanes alludes to it in *Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus* (fr. 235, 278, 281).

²⁴ Carden, 37: 'Neither [of the two papyri] is identified [sc. as containing parts of *Inachus*] beyond all doubt, by any coincidence with the book fragments, of which there are 26; nor are

other it cannot be shown beyond doubt that *Inachus* was a satyr play and not a tragedy, as early editors of the book fragments (Pearson and Nauck) thought.²⁵ But the meticulous analysis of the papyrus fragments by Pfeiffer, Carden, and Sutton have made it more than likely that both papyri preserve parts of the Sophoclean *Inachus* and that it was a satyr play.²⁶

Sophocles here presents the early events of the tragic story of Io, daughter of the river god Inachos: Zeus seduces Io and—to conceal his love affair from his wife—transforms the young girl into a heifer. Hera, who, of course, sees through his ploy immediately, requests the heifer as a present and lets Argus the hundred-eyed giant, guard her. When Zeus sends Hermes to kill Argus and free Io, Hera sends a gadfly, which with its bites drives the miserable young girl in an endless journey through many countries, until she finally reaches Egypt, where she regains her old form and gives birth to Zeus' son Epaphus.

The preserved fragments do not allow a complete reconstruction of the plot of the Sophoclean play.²⁷ In the first of the scenes, from which we have fragments (*POxy* 2369 = fr. 266a,b), an eyewitness—probably Inachus²⁸—reports to the Chorus that the black stranger,²⁹ whom he has trusted and honoured with his hospitality—probably no other than Zeus himself³⁰—has transformed his daughter into a cow and then disappeared. It is

the two related to one another by any stronger link than that they both deal with the same story'.

²⁵ For the history of the discussion, cf. Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 313 f.

²⁶ Pfeiffer (1938) and (1958); Carden (1974) 52–93; Sutton (1979); for the best attempt to show that the play was a tragedy, see Calder (1958).

²⁷ For a highly speculative attempt, see Allen (2003).

²⁸ Pavese (1967) 35 and Conrad (1997) 130–139 think that it is Silenus.

²⁹ Cf. Seaford (1980); West (1984).

³⁰ E. Lobel, *POxy* XXIII (1956) ad lines 53 f.: 'In view of the fact, that Io's son by Zeus was black, it is not far-fetched to infer that in Sophocles' version of the story ... Zeus visited Io both to beget Epaphus and to metamorphose her into a cow in the disguise of a "foreign blackamoor"'. Many critics refuse to believe that satyr drama could introduce Zeus as a *dramatis persona*. Sutton (1979; 1980, 50 f.) has suggested that the mysterious guest was Hermes. Zeus could, of course, play a major role in the play without appearing onstage. His visit could have been reported. But West (1984, 294) is right, when she states that it would be rather difficult to imagine what could have occupied the 280 lines or so which went before Inachus' report of the sudden disappearance of the stranger, if his arrival had not been the subject of an early scene (that is, in the first epeisodion), and it would make much sense if he appeared again at the end of the play to foretell the future of Io. Furthermore, even if Zeus did not appear in Aeschylus' *Psychostasia* (cf. Pollux 4.130), there are a number of comedies in which he did appear as *dramatis persona*, and among them three which present the story of Io (by Plato, Sannyrion, and Anaxandrides); cf. Voelke (2003) 342. *Momus* and *Salmeoneus* are two other satyr plays in which Zeus played a role and may have appeared onstage.

probable that the report stood at the beginning of the second epeisodion³¹ and was preceded by prologue, *parodos*, first epeisodion (with the arrival and friendly reception of the mysterious stranger), and first *stasimon*, the last line of which are preserved before the report of the transformation.

The text of the second scene, which is preserved on a second papyrus (P.Tebt. 692 = fr. 269c), is badly damaged. It is, nevertheless, possible to reconstruct an encounter of the satyr Chorus with Hermes, who appears to have come to kill Argus and set Io free. This means that in the lost part of the play between the two preserved scenes Hera—most likely through the female divine messenger Iris³²—must have arranged for the custody of Io.

The scene begins at the moment the satyrs hear the sound of a syrinx, but cannot see who plays it, because Hermes wears the Hades-cap, which makes him invisible.³³ The details of the following encounter are lost. But it is sufficiently clear that Hermes continues to confuse and scare the satyrs, and that somebody—possibly Silenus—encourages them and tells them to resist the aggressor.³⁴

The scene allows the conclusion that the satyrs, probably in the service of Inachus, assisted Argus in watching Io. A second fragment of the same papyrus (fr. 269d) contains the remnants of a fierce dispute, probably between Hermes and Inachus.³⁵ The position of this scene within the dramatic structure of the play is uncertain.

The many book fragments provide a number of clues for further scenes: The anapaests, in which the Chorus praise the river god Inachus as the lord of Argos (fr. 270), will have been part of the *parodos*, and if the satyrs address him directly, he must have been onstage already in the prologue. It is possible, but far from certain, that Sophocles has left the exposition (or part of it) to the king.³⁶ In a scholion on Aristophanes' *Plutus* 866 (fr. 275) we read that in Sophocles' *Inachus*, 'when Zeus entered (or visited Argos?) every place became full of good things', and other fragments suggest that Argos for

³¹ A marginal annotation in line 36 of the Oxyrrhynchus papyrus 2369 (fr. 269a) shows that the first preserved line is line 277 of the play.

³² Fr. 272 shows that Iris was a *dramatis persona*.

³³ For the cap of Hades, see Pfeiffer (1938) 33–36.

³⁴ The identification of the two speakers of the short stichomythic passage, with which the fragment ends, is disputed: Pfeiffer (1938) and Carden (1974): Silenus—coryphaeus; Carden (1974): Silenus—Hermes; Conrad (1997): Argus—coryphaeus; Körte: Argus—Hermes.

³⁵ For fr. 2 of the Tebtunis papyrus, cf. Pfeiffer (1938) 51–55; Carden (1974) 92 f. *ad* 63 and 70.

³⁶ Another possible candidate is Silenus, whose role may have explained the presence of the satyrs in the story of Io (as in Eur. *Cyc.*).

a long time was hard pressed by a devastating drought. Perhaps Inachus (or Silenus) spoke about the catastrophe (or about its end) in the prologue.³⁷ Furthermore, a scholion on Aristophanes' *Birds* 1203 attests the appearance of Iris *apo mechanes* (fr. 272) and scholia on Aeschylus' (?) *Prometheus* 574 show that Sophocles also brought on Argus: fr. 281 tells us that he wore the leather jerkin of herdsmen, and F 282, that Sophocles had him sing an aria. The singing hundred-eyed monster will have made a big impression on the satyrs (and on the audience). About the end of the play we can only speculate: since satyr plays must end happily, the tensions between Zeus and Inachus, and between Zeus and Hera, will have been resolved, Zeus will have prophesied the happy end of Io's long wandering³⁸ and the satyrs and Silenus will have returned to their old master Dionysus.

As our survey shows, *Ichneutae* and *Inachus*, the two plays which we know best, are in many respects quite different. The far greater number of *dramatis personae* attested for *Inachus*³⁹ made its dramatic action more complex than that of *Ichneutae*, and it has a much more serious theme. These clear differences should be a warning not to rely for the reconstruction of lost plays (even of the same author) too much upon structural, thematic, and topological parallels.

The two plays share the important aspect of having gods as *dramatis personae*, and a survey of the other Sophoclean satyr play shows that the poet had a special fondness for stories about gods and demigods. In *Dionysiscus*, as in *Ichneutae*, he presents the birth and first adventures of a god. We have a charming fragment in which Silenus describes his role as nurse of the baby Dionysus: 'For when I offer the drink I'm giving him/at once he tickles my nose and brings up/his hand to the smooth surface, smiling sweetly' (fr. 171).⁴⁰ The two other fragments indicate that Dionysus grows up as quickly as Hermes and soon, like his brother, makes a discovery: wine (fr. 172, 173).⁴¹ It is obvious that *Heracleiscus* dramatized an early event in the life of Heracles. But the gnomic character of our two fragments does not offer a certain answer to the question of whether the most famous heroic

³⁷ Frr. 276(?), 284, 286, 294(?). it is probable that it was Hera who caused the drought, as soon as she heard of her husband's sexual adventure with Io; the end of the drought could have occurred at the end of the play or already before the beginning; cf. West (1984) 297 f.

³⁸ Otherwise the introduction of a black Zeus (cf. n30) would not make sense.

³⁹ Besides Silenus and the satyrs, there are: Inachus, Zeus (?), Hermes, Iris, and Argus.

⁴⁰ Cf. Aesch. *Dict.* 786–788; for the possible sexual double entendre of *phalakron*, cf. p. 235.

⁴¹ For the reconstruction of the play, cf. Sutton (1974); Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 250–258.

deed of the little Heracles stood in the centre of the play—the strangling of the two serpents sent by Hera, or his education by Chiron or by Linus.⁴² If the title *Hybris* refers to the mother of Pan,⁴³ mentioned by Apollodorus (1.4.1) and Tzetzes (*ad Lycophronem* 772) we would have a third Sophoclean play, which dealt with the birth of a god or demigod, in this case one close to Silenus and the satyrs.

As we have seen, in *Inachus* Sophocles brought onstage, besides the river-god Inachus, not only the two divine messengers, Hermes and Iris, and the giant Argus, but even Zeus himself, and Prometheus appears to have played a role in two of his satyr plays. For *The Dumb Ones* (*Kôphoi*) a scholion on Nicander, *Theriaca* 343–354, attests a story that would very well lend itself to a satyr play: Prometheus steals the gods' fire and bestows it upon mankind. Some ingrates, however, betray the thief to Zeus, who rewards them with a remedy against old age. When their ass grows thirsty, they seek a well; but the snake who guards it demands the *pharmakon* as payment for a drink. One can imagine how the satyrs, who played the role of the ungrateful mortals, act like dumb fools (*kôphoi*) first when they are confronted with fire and then when they forfeit the drug of immortality.⁴⁴

Prometheus' theft of the fire was certainly also an element of the satyr play called *Pandora* or *Sphyrokopoi* (*The Hammerers*), but in that case probably took place before the onstage narrative. The title suggests that the creation of Pandora and its consequences stood at the centre of the play. Proclus' statement that 'Prometheus received the jar of evils from the satyrs and entrusted it to Epimetheus, warning (Pandora) not to open it', may refer to Sophocles' play.⁴⁵ The satyrs may have worked as servants (*Hammerers*) for Hephaestus, and Athena may have helped to adorn Pandora, as in Hesiod.⁴⁶

⁴² Cf. Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 266–269.

⁴³ The identification is far from certain. The title could also be an abstraction, such as *Krisis* or *Eris*, referring to the theme of the play; and—less likely—it could be the name of a satyr; on a red-figure *pelike* from Vulci (München, Staatliche Antikensammlung 2360) one of the satyrs trying to get away with the weapons of Heracles, after the hero has been burnt on Mount Oeta, is called *Hybris*.

⁴⁴ Zenobius (fr. 365 Radt) attests that Sophocles in *Kophoi* mentioned a quarrel between the Idaean Dactyloi. His formulation 'mentions' suggests that the story was not part of the dramatic action. For a reconstruction of the plot which tries to connect both myths, see Bates (1934).

⁴⁵ Proclus (quoted by a scholiast to Hes. *Op.* 89) could also refer to Aesch. *Prometheus Pyrcaeus*; cf. Mette (1963) 11 f.

⁴⁶ Hes. *Theog.* 570–587, *Op.* 60–82.

It is also probable that the play, from which Plutarch cites a line spoken by Admetus, belongs to the group of Sophoclean satyr plays in which the gods were characters: 'My rooster led him [i.e. Apollo] to the mill' (fr. 851). Since Aristophanes of Byzantium attests that neither Aeschylus nor Sophocles have treated the story of the Euripidean *Alcestis*, there are only two episodes of the myth of Admetus that Sophocles could have used for his satyr play: Apollo's service for Admetus after he had killed the Cyclopes and the god's assistance to Admetus when he wooed Alcestis.⁴⁷

Finally, gods and goddesses must have been the protagonists (besides the satyrs and Silenus) in three more Sophoclean satyr plays,⁴⁸ which presented three closely connected episodes from the events before the Trojan war. In *Strife* (*Eris*) the satyrs participated in the marriage of Thetis and Peleus and watched how Eris, the goddess of strife, threw down the golden apple;⁴⁹ *Judgment* (*Krisis*) presented the judgement of Paris in the quarrel of the three goddesses caused by Eris' action;⁵⁰ and in *Momus* the satyrs perhaps witnessed the amorous adventure of Zeus with Leda, the result of which was Helen, the prize of the judgement of Paris and the cause of the Trojan war.⁵¹

⁴⁷ The title of the play is not attested (cf. *TrGF* IV *ad* fr. 851). If Steffen and Sutton (cf. n3) are right that Sophocles wrote a play called *Iambe* (after the old woman who tried to cheer up Demeter with obscene jokes after the disappearance of her daughter), Demeter—and perhaps Persephone and Plutus—would be among the many gods who appeared in Sophoclean satyr plays.

⁴⁸ It cannot be ruled out completely that the play is identical with *Crisis* (cf. Ahrens 1844; Lloyd-Jones 1996, 76 f.).

⁴⁹ Cf. Pearson (1917) 1.139, and Lloyd-Jones (1996) 76 f.; Welcker (cf. n30) thought that the play dramatized the quarrel between Zeus and Poseidon over Thetis. The only fragment (fr. 199: 'And I (fem.), being hungry, look again at the cakes') indicates that the play was a satyr play, but does not provide a clue to the subject matter.

⁵⁰ According to Athenaeus (fr. 361), Aphrodite appeared anointed with myrrh and gazing at herself in the mirror, whereas Athena anointed herself with oil and took exercise. Because of the 'three actors' rule, the three goddesses cannot have appeared onstage together (with Paris and/or Silenus). Since our best source Athenaeus (fr. 361) speaks only of Athena and Aphrodite, it has been assumed that perhaps only these two were *dramatis personae*. But it is, of course, possible, that Hera (or all three) appeared in separate scenes; Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 356–362.

⁵¹ The five fragments consist only of single words and shed no light on the subject matter of the play, which may have been the story told by a scholiast on Hom. *Il.* 1.5: When Zeus wants to reduce the population of the earth, Momus, the embodiment of censure and mockery, suggests that he should beget a beautiful daughter, over whom a great war would break out, killing many. Another possibility is Momus' criticism of various achievements of the gods (Aesop 102 Hausrath).

Given the enormous importance of gods and goddesses in Sophoclean satyr drama, it is noteworthy that Euripides, in whose tragedies gods appear much more frequently than in Aeschylus or Sophocles, largely abandoned this practice in his satyr plays.

Besides *Eris*, *Crisis*, and *Momus* there are possibly four other Sophoclean satyr plays, which thematized events from the antecedents of the Trojan war. *The Lovers of Achilles*, *Helen's Wedding*, and—perhaps—*The Dinners*⁵² and *The Shepherds*.⁵³

Since a title in the plural as a rule refers to the satyrs,⁵⁴ we can assume that the satyrs in *The Lovers of Achilles* tried to approach Achilles. However, it seems that in the course of the action they turned back to the female sex. Photius quotes a line from the play with the addendum: 'When the satyrs' appetite for women grows, Phoenix exclaims: "Ah, you have lost your darling (*paidiká*), as you see!"'

We know nothing of the plot. The seesaw between homo- and heterosexual passions could indicate that the play (or at least a good part of it) treated Achilles' stay on Scyros.⁵⁵ But the hypothesis is not without problems. For if Phoenix' exclamation is the reaction to the moment when the satyrs turn their back on Achilles and start to approach the daughters of Lycomedes,

⁵² The *Diners* (*Syndeipnoi* or *Syndeipnon*) is the most disputed of the potential satyr plays of Sophocles. Of central importance in the discussion (since Welcker 1826) is fr. 565: 'But in his anger he hurled at me the stinking chamber pot, nor did he miss; and the vessel, which did not smell of myrrh, broke about my head, and I was shocked by the unpleasing smell.' Many critics have argued that these lines cannot come from a tragedy; cf. however Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 397 f. Recently there have been several votes for the satyr play; cf. Palutan (1996); Lopez-Eire (2003) 399 f.; Redondo (2003) 431; Lämmle (2011) xxx; but cf. the warning of Sommerstein (2003b) 368: 'It is, however, dangerous to be dogmatic about what themes or language are or are not below the dignity of tragedy'. Cf. also Sommerstein/Fitzpatrick/Talbot (2006) 84–140.

⁵³ The play presented events from the beginning of the Trojan War; a scholiast to Lycophron 530 (fr. 497) testifies that the death of Protesilaus was mentioned; Hector (fr. 498) and Cynus (fr. 501?) were *dramatis personae*. The character of some of the fragments is such that Hermann already suggested that the play could not have been a tragedy; but whereas he thought that it was prosatyr (like Eur. *Alc.*), Rosen (2003) and Lämmle (2011) have made a good case for it being a satyr play. However, if the play is correctly restored in *POxy* 2256, fr. 3 (cf. *TrGF* I²; *TrGF* III, T 70), this cannot be the case, and the untragic quality of fragments cannot be considered as compelling proof (cf. n30).

⁵⁴ The exceptions are: Aesch. *Keres* or *Phorcydes* (*TrGF* I DID A 2a 31) and Aesch. *Trophoi* (Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker 1999, 197–201) and Soph. *Syndeipnoi* (cf. n47).

⁵⁵ A scholion on Hom. *Il.* 19.326 claims that Peleus, because he knew that if Achilles went to Troy he would be killed there, brought his son to Scyros, where, hidden among the daughters of Lycomedes, he would grow up safely.

they must know that Achilles, who is dressed as a girl, in fact is a young man; and if they fall in love with Achilles because they think he is a girl, there must be another man, who at first was their *eromenos*.

In the hypothesis of Aeschylus' *Aetnaeae* (*TrGF* III 126 f.), *The Lovers of Achilles* is listed as an example for a change of scene, and some of the fragments suggest that part of the play (probably the beginning) was set in the palace of Peleus, where Phoenix educated the young Achilles. Chiron's cave on Mount Pelion is another possibility. As potential competitors of the satyrs for the love of Achilles, critics have suggested Heracles, Patroclus, and Chiron. The lines in which Peleus narrates how he won Thetis (fr. 150) could come from the prologue. At the end the disguised Achilles will have been discovered. Frr. 156 and 157a speak of his departure for Troy and of his famous weapons made by Hephaestus. In *Helen's Wedding* Sophocles may have dramatized the union of Helen and Paris on the island Cranaë (*Hom. Il.* 3.443 f.); in *The Dinners* the topic appears to have been the first quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles on the island of Tenedos,⁵⁶ whereas *The Shepherds* dealt with the arrival of the Greeks at the shores of Troy and the first deaths of the war (Protesilaus and Cynus).⁵⁷

If the assumption that these plays (or most of them) were satyr plays is correct, Sophocles has taken the subject matter of about 20% of his satyr plays from the *Cypria*, whereas he never used the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* but only once—if *Nausicaa* or *Plyntriae* (*The Women Washing Clothes*) was a satyr play.⁵⁸ A glance at Radt's list of the topics of Sophocles' plays shows that his tragedies reveal the same predilections.⁵⁹

Four of the satyr plays based on the *Cypria* display Sophocles' special penchant for erotic themes, and if we add *Pandora* or *Hammerers* and the so-called *Oeneus Play*, we can see the significance of beautiful women and Eros, courtship and weddings in his satyr plays.⁶⁰ Aeschylus and Euripides did not share this penchant, as it seems, and the same is true for a cluster of dramatic and thematic motifs consisting of marvellous inventions, transformations and appearances, magical substances and objects.⁶¹ The invention of wine

⁵⁶ Cf. n30.

⁵⁷ Cf. n30.

⁵⁸ Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 394 f.

⁵⁹ Radt (1982) 194 f.; cf. also above n30.

⁶⁰ This fits the biographical tradition which presents a highly erotic Sophocles; cf. Griffith (2005).

⁶¹ Examples can also be found in the satyr plays of Aeschylus and Euripides, but they are much more frequent in the satyr plays of Sophocles.

(*Dionysiscus*), of musical instruments (*Ichneutae*, *Inachus*?⁶²) or of fire and metalwork (*The Dumb Ones* and/or *Pandora*); the creation of Pandora (*Pandora*) and the production of lightning and thunder (*Salmoneus*); the transformation of Io into a cow, the cap of Hades, which confers invisibility on Hermes, and the appearance of the black stranger and of the hundred-eyed Argus (all in the *Inachus*); the unnatural rapidity with which Hermes and Dionysus grow to adult size (*Dionysiscus* and *Ichneutae*); and the magical drug which confers immortality (*The Dumb Ones*)—all these are subjects and themes, elements and motifs, which Sophoclean satyr drama shares with folklore and fairytales.

On the other hand Sophocles did not make extended use of another popular topos which satyr drama shares with folklore. Less often than Euripides and Aeschylus, Sophocles in his satyr plays presented stories in which violent brutes and monsters get their just deserts.⁶³ A typical example is *Amycus*. Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* (1.9,20) provides a summary of the episode of the *Argonautica*: 'From Lydia they departed to the land of the Bebryces, which was ruled by King Amycus, son of Poseidon and a Bithynian nymph. Being a strong man he compelled all strangers that landed to a boxing match and killed them. So going to the Argo as usual he challenged the best man of the crew to a fight. Pollux undertook to box against Amycus and killed him with a blow on the elbow. When the Bebryces made a rush at him, the chiefs snatched up their arms and put them to flight with great slaughter'. One of the two book fragments stems from the messenger speech, which reports the fight: 'And now he knocks the jaws (of Amycus?) soft' (fr. 112). The scene of the play was a spring as in Theocritus, whose version of the story appears to have been inspired by the Sophoclean satyr play.⁶⁴ Perhaps the Argonauts, as with Odysseus in *Cyclops*, wanted to get water and supplies, and Amycus refused them access to the spring.⁶⁵

Salmoneus is another such ogre whose story Sophocles presents in a satyr play: the godless son of Aeolus who dares to compete with Zeus in producing thunder and lightning, and is struck down by the father of the gods.⁶⁶ About

⁶² It is possible that Hermes invents the syrinx for his encounter with Argus; cf. Carden (1974) 81: 'It would be quite in the manner of satyr play if the syrinx were brought in as an invention for the first time'.

⁶³ Cf. Seidensticker (1979) 240 f.; Sutton (1980) 145 f.; Lämmle (2011) 215–255.

⁶⁴ Theoc. *Id.* 22; cf. Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 249.

⁶⁵ For a possible reconstruction of the play, cf. del Corno (1971/1974).

⁶⁶ Diod. Sic. 6.7; Verg. *Aen.* 6.585–594; Apollod. I.89 f.; two of the five fragments (fr. 538 and 539) come from a scene in which the hero prepared the production of thunder and lightning.

the plot and further characters nothing is known. To this small group we may finally add the play in which Heracles descends to the underworld to fetch Cerberus,⁶⁷ and perhaps also Daedalus. The hypothesis that this was a satyr play rests solely on the presence of Talus, whose story Apollonius Rhodius narrates in his *Argonautica* (4.1638–1688).⁶⁸ In the latter, the bronze giant, who guards Crete and keeps all ships away from its coast, is destroyed by Medea.⁶⁹

2. *The Chorus of Satyrs*

The Chorus of satyr-drama always consisted of satyrs, whose character shaped the tone and atmosphere of the genre to a much greater extent than the changing Choruses of tragedy. Satyrs are living antitheses of everything that the (predominantly male) audience had learned and accepted to honour as the desirable goals of education, indeed as the foundation of Athenian society and human civilization.⁷⁰ These satyrs are childish, naive and boisterous, clumsy and good for nothing; thoughtless and unreliable, thievish, drunken and lewd, curious but jittery, impudent but submissive, bragging but cowardly. Silenus' vehement criticism of his sons in *Ichneutae* sketches a typical picture of them (145–152):

Why does a mere noise alarm and scare you? Tell me, you damned waxwork dummies, you worthless animal dung! You see terror in every shadow, scared at everything! Useless assistants—spineless, slovenly, unenterprising. Just bodies, and tongue and phalluses. In every crisis you profess loyalty, but fly from action!

⁶⁷ Among the titles of Sophocles there are four which point to Heracles; three are attested as satyr plays; the fourth (*Cerberos*) probably has been one also. Since Heracles was the satyr play hero *par excellence* it is not impossible that all four are separate plays, but it seems more likely that at least (*Heracles*) at *Taenarum* and *Cerberos* are alternative titles for the same play; cf. Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 259f. (for the four plays Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker 1999, 261–276).

⁶⁸ Cf. 160 and 161; Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 389f.

⁶⁹ The greatest problem for the reconstruction of the play is the fact that there is no testimony for a connection between Daedalus and Talus, who was built not by Daedalus, but by Hephaestus.

⁷⁰ Cf. Lassère (1973); Lissarague (1987/1999) 235: 'Everything takes place as if satyrs were a means to explore human nature through a fun house mirror; the satyrs are antitypes of the Athenian male citizenry and present us with an inverted anthropology (or andrology) of the ancient city state'.

And later the nymph Cyllene describes their Dionysiac nature and service:

Wild creatures, why have you attacked this green and wooded hill, haunt of wild beasts, with loudest uproar? What tricks are these? What is this change from the task with which you used to please your master? Drunken always, clad in hide of fawn, bearing the light thyrsus, you used to utter that bacchic cry in the god's train, together with the nymphs of your family and the company of your children.

The Chorus of satyr drama thus not only plays a more important dramatic role than the usual tragic Chorus, but also has a more consistent persona, and it is this persona that is central for the meaning, comic effect, and function of the genre. As Welcker has pointed out, in satyr drama—unlike in tragedy—it is not the dramatic events themselves which captivate the audience, but the effect these events produce on the satyrs.⁷¹

3. *Size of the Chorus*

Sophocles is said to have raised the size of the tragic Chorus from twelve to fifteen members, and there is little reason to believe that the Chorus of satyr drama continued as twelve.⁷² We do not know, however, at what stage of his career Sophocles introduced this change. It is therefore possible that some of his satyr plays had twelve *choreutai* and some fifteen.

4. *Mask and Costume*

The standard costume of the satyr Chorus is well known from vase paintings. All *choreutai* were naked⁷³ except for a loincloth to which standard attributes of an erect phallus and horsetail were attached; all wore (head)masks, which were bearded and snub-nosed, slightly balding, with slim, pointed ears (like horses, mules, or donkeys).⁷⁴

⁷¹ Welcker (1826) 330f.

⁷² Collinge (1958/1959) 30: 'Is it really conceivable, that midway through the tetralogy three members of the Chorus were politely told to go home?' Seaford's attempt (1984, 4) to accommodate this strong argument with the hypothesis that the *tragodoi* may not have formed the Chorus of satyr drama as well, is not convincing.

⁷³ Cf. e.g. the satyrs on the Pronomos vase; for the costumes and masks of stage satyrs, see Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 53–55 [Krumeich]; cf. also Griffith (2002).

⁷⁴ Griffith (2005) 170 has indicated the difference of the satyrs to the appearance of the comic choruses and characters: 'They present a far less gross and "low" demeanor than the

5. *The Role of the Chorus*

Normally the satyrs are integrated into mythical contexts in which they are not at home: Apollo's search for his cattle (in *Ichneutae*), Zeus' affair with Io (in *Inachus*) or Heracles' descent into the underworld (in one of the Heracles plays) are typical Sophoclean examples. Hence it follows that the satyrs and Silenus are not part of the main story, into which they stumble rather incidentally. Like the Chorus in tragedy they usually are assigned (and subordinated) to one of the protagonists of the story and thus should find their place in a comic subplot, as in *Cyclops*. Here, after a satyric prelude, and interrupted by satyric intermezzi, the main action consists in the verbal and physical agon between Odysseus and Polyphemus. But Euripides' play is by no means representative of the genre. In Aeschylean and Sophoclean satyr plays the myth often only serves as a contextual frame for the play of the satyrs. Whereas the Perseus-myth, to give just one Aeschylean example, narrates how Dictys, brother of the king of Seriphus, finds Danae and her baby on the shore of the island and takes care of them, Aeschylus in *Dictyulci* confines the arrival and reception of Danae to the beginning and end of his play. In the centre he places the encounter of the satyr Chorus and Silenus with the beautiful princess and her baby. Sophocles uses the same technique in *Ichneutae*: Apollo and Hermes, the two divine protagonists of the story, are removed to the beginning and end of the play. About two thirds of the dramatic action belongs to the satyrs: to their dog-like searching for the stolen cattle, and to their encounters first with the mysterious sounds of the lyre, then with the nymph Cylene, and finally with Hermes the thief of the cattle and inventor of the lyre.

Francois Lissarague has formulated the recipe used by the tragedians to prepare their satyric desserts in a short and pointed phrase: 'Take one myth, add satyrs, observe the result'.⁷⁵ Aeschylus and Sophocles love to entrust the satyrs with tasks which were originally of minor importance: the hauling in of the net (in *Dictyulci*) or the search for the cattle (in *Ichneutae*). The result is that the minor detail develops its own momentum and becomes the main action. The satyr Chorus (and Silenus) take over the myth; they

padded and deformed figures of comedy.' Whether their phalluses were 'small and relatively inoffensive', as Griffith infers from the representation of theatrical satyrs on vases, must, however, be left open.

⁷⁵ Lissarague (1987/1999) 236.

interrupt and modify the story, retard or advance the action, into which they have been transplanted, and thus—unexpectedly, but logically—become the protagonists.⁷⁶

But it would be rash to generalize. The remains of *Inachus* seem to indicate that the importance of the Chorus for the dramatic action here may have been smaller than in *Ichneutae*. The much larger number of characters and the greater complexity of the dramatic action appear to leave less room for the Chorus, and this helps to explain why the satyrs play a less dominant role here. There certainly were encounters in which the comic reactions of the satyrs could be exploited dramatically,⁷⁷ but the satyrs here seem to have reacted (as in *Cyclops*) rather than acted (as in *Ichneutae*). We should not exclude the possibility that the use of the Chorus differed considerably from play to play, or that the importance of the Chorus as *dramatis persona* gradually diminished in the course of the fifth century as it did in tragedy.⁷⁸

Some caution is also advisable when it comes to the question of how the presence of the satyrs in incongruous contexts was motivated. It is likely that in those plays in which a brutal villain was defeated, they were temporarily enslaved,⁷⁹ but we should not assume that this was the case whenever the satyrs found themselves in an uncongenial context. In *Ichneutae* they offer their help to Apollo freely and this may well have been the case in *Inachus* and other plays, in which they take on activities, for which they lacked either the ability or the desire. In Sophocles they work for instance as male nurses (*Dionysiscus*), hunters (*Ichneutae*), guards and/or herdsmen (*Inachus*),⁸⁰ and as assistants in the workshops of Hephaestus⁸¹ and Salmoneus.⁸²

⁷⁶ In the course of this development, they in some cases take over the role of the hero or compete with him: thus they play the host to Danae (Aesch. *Dict.*), promise to solve the riddle of the Sphinx (Aesch. *Sphinx*) or compete with Heracles for the hand of Deianeira [Soph. *Oeneus* (?)].

⁷⁷ Encounters, for instance, with the black stranger, the transformed Io (?), Hermes with the syrinx and cap of Hades, Iris as *dea ex machina*, the hundred-eyed Argus.

⁷⁸ During the fifth century the percentage of lines sung, chanted or spoken by the Chorus decreased from 40–50% in the preserved Aeschylean tragedies to around 10% in Euripides' *Orestes* and Sophocles' *Philoctetes*; in any case, in the handling of the Chorus *Inachus* seems to have been closer to *Cyclops* than to *Ichneutae*; none of the two plays is dated, but it is agreed that *Ichneutae* is an early play.

⁷⁹ Cf. Seaford (1984) 33–35; Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 28f.

⁸⁰ They may also have been herdsmen in *Krisis* (on Mount Ida, together with Paris) and *Admetus*; for a list of the roles satyrs play in satyr drama, see Lämmle (2007) 355n66 (and 174–179).

⁸¹ *Pandora, Kedalion, The Dumb Ones*.

⁸² *Salmoneus*.

At the end of the plays—liberated from slavery or unwelcome work—they will have returned to their original status as servants of Dionysus.

6. (*Pappo*)*Silenus*

The literary evidence on the theatrical figure of Silenus is rather limited, but it leaves no doubt that the figure was as obligatory as the satyrs, and it allows some observations about the development and character of the role.⁸³ On the one hand Papposilenus is the true father of the satyrs, who always shares their fate and exhibits the same typical character traits as his naughty sons. On the other hand he can act on his own or even in clear opposition to the Chorus. This unique conception raises the question of whether Silenus should be taken as a separate and independent actor's role, as a Chorus-leader, or as a *tertium quid* between Chorus and actors.

It can be shown that, in the course of the fifth century, the role gradually developed from Chorus-leader to dramatic character.⁸⁴ That the introduction of the third actor, with which Aristotle credits Sophocles, provided the means for this development is obvious,⁸⁵ and it is therefore no wonder that it is in Sophocles' *Ichneutae* that the separation of Chorus and Silenus is evident for the first time: At the beginning of the play he perhaps enters without the satyrs, and in the course of the action he leaves the orchestra at least once. Some scholars have argued that the question he addresses to the satyrs in line 124 ('What are you doing there?') can best be explained if, since telling the satyrs to set to work, he has not observed their progress.⁸⁶ But it seems more likely that, when the satyrs fanned out in different directions, he sat down at the side of the orchestra.⁸⁷ He later joins his sons to direct the hunt (124), but dashes off when he hears the mysterious sounds of the lyre (203). The satyrs' attempt to hold him back is in vain, and he probably does not return before the final scenes of the play to claim the promised reward.

That the Silenus of *Ichneutae* acts as *dramatis persona* and not as Chorus-leader is also shown by the fact that he converses in trimeters with the Chorus, i.e. with the coryphaeus.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the obligatory figure of

⁸³ Cf. Conrad (1997).

⁸⁴ Cf. Collinge (1959); Hourmouziades (1974); Sutton (1974); Conrad (1997).

⁸⁵ The satyr plays which allow such an analysis require two actors; the third was free for the role of Silenus.

⁸⁶ Wilamowitz (1912/1935) 356; Siegmann (1941); Hourmouziades (1974) 94.

⁸⁷ Cf. Münscher (1914) esp. 179; Conrad (1997) 108.

⁸⁸ 142 ff., 203 ff.

Silenus is a very special part, which in tragedy can only be compared with the roles of Danaus in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* or of Hecuba in Euripides' *Trojan Women*. For the father of the satyrs, despite his differentiation, remains part of the satyr family. He not only always shares the dramatic fate of his sons, but also their ethos and function, and, together with them, he represents the Dionysiac *thiasos* which defines the genre.⁸⁹

In the preserved part of *Ichneutae* Sophocles develops just one of his typical character traits: his braggadoccio.⁹⁰ Already his first words, declaring that despite his old age he has reacted quickly to Apollo's request (45–47), introduce this theme. He then stylizes himself as the god's benefactor, who is willing to do him a favour (48–50), and sees himself already as the victor of the search, who will receive the golden prize Apollo has offered as a reward for locating his cattle (50f.). Finally, when Apollo has left, he assumes the god's role and puts himself on a par with him (79–85). The culmination of his arrogance is reached in his speech blaming the satyrs for their cowardice and praising his own qualities and achievements (153–161):

Yet your father, you worthless brutes, when young by his valour set up many a splendid trophy in he nymphs' abodes; he never yielded to flight, never lost courage, never ducked at noises made by cattle grazing on the hills; he performed feats with the spear whose lustre you now tarnish at some shepherd's latest call. Scared to babies before you even see!

The fall from this haughtiness follows promptly. As soon as he hears the sound of the lyre (203), he dashes off and in his fear totally forgets not only his promises but also the gold and the freedom, which meant so much to him at the beginning. Since the second half of the play is lost, we do not know how he is treated when he returns after the discovery of the thief to claim the reward.

The remains of *Inachus* are so fragmentary that it is impossible to determine Silenus' role. Since the satyrs appear to work as guards (and/or herds-men) for Inachus, their father may have contracted the new job with the king and then have supervised and directed his sons; but we cannot attribute any of the few preserved lines to him with any certainty.⁹¹ The only other Sophoclean satyr play, of which we possess at least a few lines of a scene in which Silenus is the central figure, happen to be *Dionysiscus*. In this play he and the satyrs take care of the baby Dionysus, whom Zeus has

⁸⁹ Cf. Seaford (1984) 26–33.

⁹⁰ Cf. Siegmann (1941) 71 f.; Conrad (1997) 98–117; Zazagi (1999) 180–189.

⁹¹ For an attempt, cf. Conrad (1997) 128–149.

hidden from his angry wife in the wooded mountains of Nysa. The three trimeters preserved in the Lexicon Messanense (fol. 283^r, 18 = fr. 171) could have been spoken either by Silenus or by the satyrs.⁹² But there is good reason to believe that the speaker is Silenus, who, as in Aeschylus, *Dictyulci*,⁹³ describes his role as old nurse:

For when I offer him the drink I'm giving him, at once he tickles my nose, and brings up his hand to the smooth surface, smiling sweetly.⁹⁴

7. Music and Dance

7.1. Music

The music is completely lost. This is unfortunate, since music plays a very important role in both satyr plays of which we have major fragments. Besides the songs and dances of the satyrs, accompanied by the same flautist as the preceding three tragedies, musical instruments were heard both in *Ichneutae* and in *Inachus*:

In *Ichneutae* the sound of the lyre, which Hermes has invented, first leads the satyrs towards the cave, where the god is hidden, and then, when Cyllene explains how Hermes built the instrument, to the identification of the thief, and at the end it is the gift of the lyre that allays Apollo's anger and thus dissolves the tension between the two divine brothers. It is most likely that during this final part of the play Hermes shows Apollo how to play the lyre, and Apollo plays the new instrument and sings. During the search the sounds of the lyre are a source of much comic acting. When the satyrs suddenly hear the lyre, they throw themselves to the ground and stick their arses in the air; Silenus himself, first cursing the satyrs for being cowards, upon hearing the strange sounds storms off as well, not reappearing before the end of the play.⁹⁵

Yet another musical sound is announced in the same scene by Silenus, who declares that he will direct the search of his sons by a *kynorthikon syrigma* (*dog-driving pipe*). It is likely that during the following song and dance of the satyrs he merely pretends to whistle or pipe while the actual

⁹² Lloyd-Jones (1996) 66.

⁹³ *TrGF* IV, fr. 47a (Radt) 770, 786–795.

⁹⁴ *TrGF* III, fr. 171 (Radt).

⁹⁵ Cf. p. 235. For the importance of musical and other noises in *Ichneutae*, see Lämmle (2011) 30.

sounds were produced by the professional flautist of the production.⁹⁶ This certainly was the case in the scene of *Inachus*, where the invisible Hermes by playing the syrinx drives the satyrs crazy. Finally, *Inachus* presented yet another special musical effect, the singing of the hundred-eyed Argus.⁹⁷

7.2. *Dance*

Singing and dancing, together with drinking, of course, and chasing nymphs, is what satyrs like best. The importance of dance in satyr-drama is indirectly attested by the astonishingly rich choreographic terminology, preserved in a variety of literary sources,⁹⁸ and by the archaeological material. Vase paintings usually portray members of satyr choruses in some kind of movement: running or jumping, hopping or dancing, as if they cannot control their legs and feet. On a bell-crater in Sydney we see three young *choreutai* dressed as satyrs. As soon as one of them has put on his mask, the dance begins; and similarly the only young Athenian on the Pronomos vase wearing a mask, is shown in a typical dance movement, as if dance was considered the most significant visual symbol of satyrs and satyr-drama.⁹⁹

At first glance it looks as if the preserved texts do not confirm the archaeological evidence. Compared with tragedy the choral odes of satyr-drama are rather short.¹⁰⁰ But this does not mean that song and dance were less important than in tragedy. The opposite seems to have been the case. A number of clues indicate that the *satyroi*—unlike *tragodoi*—did not only dance during the choral odes proper. Thus, in the Euripidean *Cyclops*, when Polyphemus, on his return from the hunt, angrily addresses the Chorus with the question τί βακχιάζετε ('Why this Bacchic hubbub?') (204), it is clear that the satyrs have begun a wild dance.¹⁰¹

Ichneutae shows that Sophocles used the same dramatic technique: When the satyrs try to force the unknown resident of the cave to appear, they announce:

⁹⁶ Hourmouziades (1974) 94; Taplin (1993) 74 (for comedy).

⁹⁷ For musical instruments in satyr play, cf. Kaimio et al. (2001) 46–53.

⁹⁸ Lawler (1964).

⁹⁹ Cf. Seidensticker (2010).

¹⁰⁰ The longest lyrical passage of *Ichneutae* is the astrophic chase song 176–202; the longest choral ode of Euripides' *Cyclops* has 37 lines (the *parodos* 41).

¹⁰¹ Cf. also *Cyc.* 94: Silenus' order, 'keep still', makes sense only if the satyrs, in their excitement at the sight of the Greeks, have started to dance and chatter. At 219–221, the Cyclops' answer to the request of the satyrs not to swallow them together with the breakfast drink which they have prepared for him, appears to indicate that they are dancing wildly: 'You least. I'd soon be dead if I had you jumping up and down in my belly!'.

But I'll quickly make the ground ring with repeated jumps and kicks, and force him to hear me, however deaf he may be. (217–220)

That with these words the Chorus start a vigorous dance is more than likely, and there is good reason to believe that the satyrs also begin to dance excitedly when they discover the hoofprints of the stolen cattle (before line 100), and that the whole search-scene is interspersed with dance movements. 'It is impossible to resist the impression that the Chorus of satyrs is at any moment ready to burst into vigorous action expressed in dance and song.'¹⁰² The short lyrical passages of *Ichneutae* at first directly grow out of their tracking of the stolen cattle and then, when Cyllene appears, are part of the conversation with the nymph; and in the only other preserved choral scene from a Sophoclean satyr play, the singing and dancing of the satyrs is equally part of the dramatic dialogue.¹⁰³

The choreography of the satyr dances is almost completely lost. But some elements can perhaps be reconstructed and the general characteristics determined.¹⁰⁴

1. The brevity¹⁰⁵ and metrical simplicity¹⁰⁶ of the choral odes allow the conclusion that the choreography was not as complex as in tragedy, and this conclusion, in the case of the few Sophoclean examples we have, appears to be confirmed by the epirrhematic structure in which short lyrical passages alternate with spoken or chanted lines.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Seaford (1984) 17. Whether 'the frequent agitated choral passages are relics of an improvisatory performance', as Seaford thinks, or just the inevitable result of the fact that the Chorus of satyr drama is an active part of the dramatic movement—or both—may be left undecided.

¹⁰³ The close integration of the Chorus into the dramatic action which we see in these scenes has consequences for the structure of the plays. Taplin is right when he states that the basic structural pattern of tragedy, in which the choral odes are marked off from the acts by means of actors' exits before songs and entries after them, can be applied with certain modifications to *Cyclops*, but not to satyr-drama in general: 'In the satyr play fragments of Aeschylus and Sophocles choral lyrics which are astrophic or in divided pairs, are not related with any consistency to entrances and exits and conversely the movements of actors are not grouped around the songs. Compared with tragedy satyr play (at least classical satyr play) has a loose and undefined structure that makes for a rambling continuity which does not really fall into parts' (1977, 9).

¹⁰⁴ Seidensticker (2010).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. n30.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Seaford (1984) 46 f.; Griffith (2005a) 169 f.; Voelke (2001) 167–174; most of the songs are astrophic; cf. Jens (1971) 91 f. [Rode].

¹⁰⁷ F 269a46–56, 269c; F 1130,2 (?); cf. Pfeiffer (1958) 27 f.; Carden (1974) 70, 88; Voelke (2001) 159–164.

2. Our ancient sources agree that the *sicinnis*, the standard dance of satyr-drama, was vigorous.¹⁰⁸ Etymologically the word probably comes from a Phrygian root with the meaning: 'leap, move with agility', and several of the numerous schemata attested for the satyr dances carry the notion of rapid movement already in their names.¹⁰⁹

The *metra* of the short choral odes point in the same direction. In *Ichneutae* and *Inachus* we mostly find anapaests or dochmiacs and in the Cyl-lene scene of *Ichneutae* two iambo-cretic songs (243–250; 329–337); it is symptomatic that the long elements of these metres are often resolved.¹¹⁰ In *Inachus* Sophocles combines anapaests and dochmiacs with trochaic tetrameters, a verse named for its tempo.¹¹¹

3. If the vividness of the satyr dances—and their nature—are taken into account, it is not surprising that texts and vases¹¹² suggest time and again that the Chorus in satyr-drama (more often than its tragic counterpart) is split up into two or three parts or even broken up entirely into individual members.

Thus at the beginning of *Ichneutae* the Chorus probably did not march into the orchestra in rectangular formation—as we are told the Chorus in tragedy used to do, but rather the *choreutai* came in running in groups or one by one;¹¹³ and Hourmouziades has shown, in a detailed and precise analysis of the first part of the play, that during the initial part of the search for Apollo's cattle, different parts of the Chorus carry out individual movements in different parts of the orchestra,¹¹⁴ and that later, as the search

¹⁰⁸ Cf. e.g. Aristoxenus, fr. 104 (Wehrli); for the *sicinnis*, cf. Festa (1918); Seaford (1984) *ad* 37; Voelke (2001) 138–143, 149–151, 176 f.; Lämmle (2011) 146–172.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. e.g. *sobas* from *sobeo*, to move rapidly, or *strobilos* from *strobo*, to twist, whirl around.

¹¹⁰ We find proceleusmatic anapaests: e.g. *Ichn.* 176 ff. (185, 190, 195, 196, 200, 201); *Inachus* 269c16–20; dochmiacs with initial double short: *Inachus* 269c27, 29; Paeons (cretics with resolved first longum): *Ichn.* 176 ff.

¹¹¹ Fr. 269c.

¹¹² On vases inspired by satyr plays we sometimes find the satyrs in some sort of group formation; more often, however, the painter shows the members of the satyr Chorus not in a regimented motion, but with different gestures and movements.

¹¹³ This was certainly the case in Euripides' *Cyclops*, but it is more than likely also for Aeschylus' *Dictyulci* (fr. 46a, 17–21, and fr. 46c); cf. Siegmann (1941) 29–33; for the entrance of the satyrs in *Ichneutae*, cf. also Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 296n24 (with the different suggestions).

¹¹⁴ Hourmouziades (1974) 86–90; the damaged text is difficult to interpret, but lines 103–105 leave little doubt that the Chorus has split up into at least three separate groups.

continues and Silenus tries to order and direct the trackers with his pipe, the Chorus, confused by the different sounds and rhythms of their father's pipe and of the subterranean lyre played by Hermes, disintegrate completely.¹¹⁵

In *Inachus* Sophocles appears to have used the same technique for the animated scene in which the satyrs encounter the invisible Hermes. The text is badly damaged, but it is sufficiently clear that in the course of the scene the Chorus splits up into either two halves, or single members.

4. The nature of the ithyphallic satyrs suggests—and the hints in the dramatic texts confirm—that, while the dances of the satyr choruses were perhaps less obscene than those of comedy, they certainly contained obscene elements.¹¹⁶ For *Ichneutae* this is suggested by two dance schemata which Sophocles used in the chase scene. In line 96 Silenus describes one of the satyrs (or possibly the whole Chorus) as *diplous oklasdôn* (doubly squatting or crouching), a term which Pollux in his long list of dance terms (4,100) associates with the *komos* and further characterizes as *hygrôn* (soft, lewd). Secondly, Photius attests that Sophocles in *Ichneutae* used yet another technical term: *riknousthai* (F 316). The lexicographer explains the verb as 'to bend over, become crooked by bending one's hip in intercourse or dancing', and Pollux (4.99) similarly defines the dance figure as 'vulgar rotation of the hips with the body bent forward'.

5. Finally, it appears that the dances of satyr choruses not only expressed the ethos of the satyrs and their moods and emotions, but often also interpreted their words and illustrated their actions and reactions mimetically.¹¹⁷ The search for Apollo's cattle is a particularly striking example of this choreographic technique. There is only one lyrical passage: the astrophic ode (176–202), with its rapid rhythm, its agitated cries and questions, and the challenges and commands with which the trackers spur on and direct each other, reflects the hectic quality of the satyrs' dancing. The remainder of the extended search consists of iambic trimeters, but Silenus' order to pick up

¹¹⁵ The much disputed line 174 is best understood as a command that the satyrs should move towards the entrance of the cave in three rows (cf. Lloyd-Jones 1996, 140–142); during the following astrophic song (176 ff.) the rapid succession of questions and calls will have been assigned to different speakers, and the commands in 185, 190, 195 and 200 clearly show that the *choreutai* dance wildly around one by one.

¹¹⁶ Plato states in the *Laws* (815c), that the satyr dance resembled the wild dances of drunken and sexually aroused young men at the end of the symposion.

¹¹⁷ Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 21 [Seidensticker]; Voelke (2001) 180 f.; Griffith (2005a) 168 f.

the scent of the cattle (94, 166 f.), and the mutual exhortations of the satyrs to look closely at the tracks they have discovered, indicate that they again excitedly snoop around like a pack of hounds.¹¹⁸

Whether the lively search of the satyrs took the form of a choreographed dance must remain open. But the fact that the movements of the satyrs were somewhat stylized in a dance-like form is indicated not only by Sophocles' use of what seems to have been technical terms of dancing,¹¹⁹ or by the references to the division of the Chorus (105, 174), but also by lines 124–130, in which Silenus asks the satyrs where on earth they have learned this new *technē*:

And now what kind of trick [*technē*] have you invented? What's the game? What is it, I say, this new one, hunting on your bellies like that? What sort of method do you call this? It's a mystery to me: lying on the ground like hedgehogs in a bush or like a monkey bending over to let off at someone! What is this foolery? Where on earth did you learn this? I never heard of such behaviour.

It seems possible that Sophocles with the references to the special *technē* and unknown *tropos* of the movements points to the originality of his choreography of the search.¹²⁰

8. Satyric Diction¹²¹

The common opinion is that satyric diction is almost indistinguishable from that of tragedy; although it has a certain admixture of prosaic, ridiculous, and indecent elements, it is not easy to pinpoint the linguistic features which differentiate the two genres.

The use of *hapax legomena*, dialectical forms, neologisms and rare and exotic words, all of which have been considered characteristic of satyr drama, can indeed be documented for the satyric fragments of Sophocles.

¹¹⁸ The names in 176 ff. seem to be the names of satyrs, but associated nonetheless with the names of dogs; cf. Maltese (1982), 82–85, 85: 'Sofocle abbia abilmente utilizzato nomi satyreschi che potessero suggerire o riecheggiare nomi di cani; un raffinato tocco per trasformare definitivamente la danza in caccia, i coreuti in segugi'; cf. also Maltese (1991), 69–72.

¹¹⁹ Cf. p. 235 and Lämmle (2011) 140–145, 198 f.

¹²⁰ For possible examples of metatheatricity in satyr drama, cf. Easterling (1997c) 42–44; Kaimio et al. (2001); Bierl (2001) esp. 76–79, and especially Lämmle (2001) *passim*. Lämmle has made a strong case for her fascinating thesis that satyr-drama as a whole is a reflection of tragedy.

¹²¹ Cf. Guarini (1925); Bertolin Cebrián (1990); Melero Bellida (1991); Lopez-Eire (2003); Redondo (2003); Griffith (2006); Lämmle (2011) 23–27.

But without systematic statistical analysis it is impossible to say whether and to what degree the satyr plays in this respect differed from his tragedies.

Two other lexical fields are more promising: (a) colloquialisms and (b) vulgarisms.

a) To be sure, colloquialisms are not ruled out in tragedy,¹²² but they seem to have been much more common in satyr-drama,¹²³ where they sometimes form clusters, giving a whole passage a colloquial tone (e.g. *Ichneutae* 102 ff.)

Colloquial features which are common in satyr-drama include repetitions,¹²⁴ diminutives, and excited exclamations (both *intra* and *extra metrum*). *Ichneutae* is full of interjections and inarticulate noises: θεός θεός θεός θεός (100), when the satyrs discover the hoofprints; υ υ υ υ (131), when they suddenly hear the sounds of the lyre; υ υ υ, ψ ψ α α (176), at the beginning of the hectic chase-song.¹²⁵

b) It is generally agreed that satyr-drama made use of vulgar expressions with greater freedom than tragedy, but with much greater restraint than Old Comedy (or Iambus).¹²⁶ The preserved fragments of Sophoclean satyr-drama suggest that the poet used vulgarisms sparingly and in general refrained from coarse and obscene expressions for bodily functions: Sophocles' satyrs do fart, but the terms for farting are ἀποθυμαίνω, literally 'to make smoke' or 'fumigate' (128),¹²⁷ ψοφῆν: 168¹²⁸ and comic circumlocutions such as τερθρία πνοή, 'wind from behind' (fr. 333) or τῶν κάτω λάλησις, 'speech of the lower parts' (fr. 1130, 15 f.).¹²⁹ Obscene words for sexual organs and activities are sparse. Thus instead of βινεῖν, 'to fuck', we find ἀνθρῶσκω, 'to spring upon', (fr. 422) and εἰσάλλομαι, 'to spring or rush into' (fr. 756); instead of the obscene word for penis πέος Sophocles uses φάληγ (*Ichn.* 151) and the playful metaphor φαλακρόν: the bald (smooth) thing: 'Stop stretching out that smooth thing (*phalakron*) in delight' (*Ichn.* 368).¹³⁰

¹²² Cf. Stevens (1976).

¹²³ Stevens (1976): in Euripides' tragedies, 4 in 100 lines; in his satyr plays, 8 in 100 lines.

¹²⁴ Cf. e.g. *Ichn.* 180, 184, 189, 196, 201; *Inachus* 269c, 16.

¹²⁵ Cf. also: 64, 66, 67, 88, 104 (?; cf. Turner 1986–1987, II.155), 107, 117, 196 f., 205, 213, 443; Lämmle (2011) 30; *Inachus* 269a47 (?), 269b (Pfeiffer 1958, 12), 269c25.

¹²⁶ Cf. Lopez-Eire (2003) 400–405; Redondo (2003); Griffith (2005) 166 f., (2006a) 2–4.

¹²⁷ Cf. Wilamowitz (1912/1935) 458n1.

¹²⁸ Cf. Lloyd-Jones (1996) 140; but cf. Bain (1995) [to die, to croak].

¹²⁹ Cf. also *Syndeipnoi*, fr. 565 (and above n30).

¹³⁰ Cf. Aesch. *Dict.*, fr. 47a, 786–788; the suggestion that *phalakron* in the *Dictyulci* has the implicit meaning of a penis is not certain, but cf. 794 f., where Silenus points out that the baby likes his phallus; in *Ichneutae* the sexual connotation is most likely, since 'to spread out one's

There are fewer sexual expressions, jokes, and *double entendres* than in Euripides' *Cyclops*,¹³¹ and the few that do exist are not aggressive, but rather moderate and affectionate.¹³² On the other hand Griffith has pointed out that Sophocles' satyr plays 'contain several descriptions of the bitter-sweet and positively exciting symptoms of "falling/being in love"'.¹³³ The most famous of these is the simile Sophocles uses in the *Lovers of Achilles* to describe the bittersweet pleasures and pains of eros (fr. 149):

Or this disease [i.e. eros] is an attractive evil; It could make quite a good comparison. When ice appears out of doors, and boys seize it up while it is solid, at first they experience new pleasures. But in the end their pride will not agree to let it go, but their acquisition is not good for them if it stays in their hands. In the same way an identical desire drives lovers to act and not to act.

In another fragment of the play someone 'darts spears from his/her eyes' (fr. 157), and in *Salmonesus* the unknown speaker of fr. 537 promises 'titillation and the smack of kisses' as prizes for the winner in the kottabos game.¹³⁴

It appears that the *lexis* of love and sex in the fragments of Sophoclean satyr-drama is much less vulgar and coarse than that of Aristophanes, and since the same can be said for his colloquialisms, it seems fair to conclude that, in general, the language of his satyr plays were much closer to tragedy than to Old Comedy. If one looks at the syntax, however, there are some features which they share with comedy, such as the combination of a verbal form in the present tense with the participle of *ekho* to express duration: βαλχεύεις ἔχων: 'Why do you keep behaving madly?' (*Ichn.* 133). But much more interesting is the result of Griffith's analysis of sentence length:¹³⁵ the number of short sentences (1–10 words) is considerably higher than in the tragedies, and among them there is a strikingly high percentage of sentences

bald head in pleasure' seems hardly possible; cf. Lloyd-Jones (1996) 142; cf. also *Ichn.* 153–158 (Lloyd-Jones 1996, 139 f.); *Pandora* fr. 483 (Voelke 2003, 344 f.); cf. also Seaford (1987) 142 f.

¹³¹ Cf. Slenders (2006).

¹³² Griffith (2006) 62: 'The linguistic and behavioral register in such (i.e. sexual) contexts seems to be playful and affectionate, but not obscene, and it seems to be a certain childishness in the satyrs' character that is thus emphasized. In this respect, the excitable but perennially immature and ineffectual Chorus occupies a special place on the Athenian erotic spectrum'; cf. *Ichneutae* 366–368.

¹³³ Griffith (2006) 63.

¹³⁴ Griffith (2006) 66 refers also to fr. 474 (*Oinomaos*) and *Incertarum Fabularum* fr. 941, suggesting that they may come from satyr plays; cf. Lopez-Eire (2003) 403 *ad* fr. 1078.

¹³⁵ Griffith (2006) 59.

consisting of only 1–5 words. Furthermore it can be observed that Sophocles, who in his tragedies shows himself to be fond of complex hypotaxis, in the satyr plays prefers a rather simple paratactic sentence structure. All this makes for a relatively simple, fresh, and direct style.

9. *Tragedy at Play* (τραγωδία παίζουσα):
*Satyr Drama between Tragedy and Comedy*¹³⁶

On the one hand satyr drama has close connections with tragedy: the two unlike sisters were both written by the same authors and entered the dramatic contest as part of the tragic tetralogy together; both used the same actors, Chorus, and flautist and—for some of the *dramatis personae*—the same costumes. Dramatic structure, metre, and language with all their differences were still essentially alike; and both took their stories from the rich reservoir of myth.

On the other hand the jolly and naughty sister of tragedy is much closer to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* than to *Macbeth*, and clearly a comic genre: the world of satyr play is not without dangers and threats, fights and death, but a happy ending is obligatory. Thus in *Ichneutae* the tensions between the divine antagonists are resolved at the end, when Hermes appeases his angry brother by the gift of the lyre, and in the much more serious *Inachus* the anger of Inachus and the sufferings of his daughter Io are probably compensated—at least in part—by the prophecy of the glorious future of their race, and by the end of the terrible drought which Hera had inflicted on Argos. Furthermore, the obligatory satyrs and their old father Silenus are clearly comic figures,¹³⁷ and there are many dramatic and thematic motifs which the genre shares with comedy.¹³⁸

Last but not least satyr-drama has the same goal as comedy: both want to make the audience laugh. But their respective means of doing so, and the qualities of their laughter, are quite different:

1. Classical satyr-drama does not attack or mock living figures,¹³⁹ and it rarely satirizes contemporary developments. The only Sophoclean example

¹³⁶ Seidensticker (1979) 247–250.

¹³⁷ Cf. above pp. 236 (satyrs) and 227–229 (Silenus).

¹³⁸ Cf. Zazagi (1999).

¹³⁹ In the 4th and 3rd centuries we find the ridicule of contemporaries; cf. Seaford (1984) 19 f.; Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 593–601 (Python, *Agen*), 614–616 (*Cleanthes-drama*), 617–623 (Lycophron, *Menedemus*).

is the self-aggrandizement with which the satyr Chorus hope to win Oineus' daughter (fr. 1130).¹⁴⁰

You shall learn all! We come as suitors, we are sons of nymphs and ministers of Bacchus and neighbours of the gods. Every proper trait is part of our equipment—fighting with the spear, contests of wrestling, riding, running, boxing, biting, twisting people's balls; we have songs of music, we have oracles quite unknown and not forged, and tests for ways of healing; we can measure the skies, we can dance, our lower parts can speak. Is our study fruitless? You can avail yourself of whatever thing you like, if you assign your daughter to me.

It is possible that these lines are Sophocles' ironic comment on the bragging of the sophists,¹⁴¹ and similar passages can be found in *Cyclops* and in the fragments of Euripidean satyr plays.¹⁴² But the tone is not sharp and offensive, as it often is in Aristophanes, but playful and ironic. The long enumeration of skills twice ends with an *aprosdoketon*-joke: the list of athletic qualities closes with 'twisting people's balls' and the series of scientific abilities with farting ('our lower parts can speak').

2. Normally satyr-drama ridicules general human weaknesses as embodied in Silenus and the satyrs,¹⁴³ such as unreliability and laziness, impertinence and cowardice, drunkenness and prurience. We recognize our shortcomings, faults, and vices, but since the mythical distance takes the sting out of the presentation and the moral weaknesses never cause any serious and lasting harm, the humour is cheerful and light-hearted rather than bitter and critical.

3. Unlike Old and Middle Comedy satyr-drama does not parody myth or tragedy.¹⁴⁴ Instead it chooses cheerful or at least unproblematic stories or dramatizes a happy episode in the life of a tragic hero or family. Thus it shows the adventures of the successful homecomers from the Trojan War, Menelaus (Aesch. *Proteus*) and Odysseus (Aesch. *Circe*; Eur. *Cyc.*), but not the tragic return of Agamemnon. Just as satyr-drama presents funny

¹⁴⁰ For the title of the play and Sophocles' authorship, cf. Carden (1971) 135–146; Lloyd-Jones (1996) 418f.; Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker (1999) 368–374.

¹⁴¹ Voelke (2003) 337: 'Cette enumeration constitue un pastiche des pretentions avancées par les sophistes et notamment par Hippias (cf. Plat. *Hipp. Major* 285b–e; *Prot.* 315c, 318d–e)'.

¹⁴² Cf. Seaford (1984) 52f. (*Cyclops*); Pechstein (1998) 56–85 (Eur. *Autolycus* fr. 282, invective against athletes).

¹⁴³ For Silenus cf. pp. 227–229. For the comical traits of the satyrs, cf. pp. 225–227.

¹⁴⁴ Pfeiffer (1938) 61f.; Lissarague (1987/1999) 236.

stories, but does not make fun of them, it refrains from paratragedy, which is such an important element of Aristophanic comedy. Even in the few cases where material and thematic relations between the three tragedies and the satyr play of a tetralogy are evident, the latter either presents a happy variation on the tragic problem (Aesch. *Amymone*) or a short lucky episode of the same myth (Aesch. *Dictyulci* and *Sphinx*), without poking fun at the serious problems of the preceding tragedies. Since Sophocles gave up the Aeschylean *Inhaltstetralogie*, his satyr plays are rather independent of the preceding tragedies. Attempts to reconstruct connections between his satyr plays and his tragedies have not been successful.¹⁴⁵

But it is, of course, the contrast with tragedy which generates the main comic energy of satyr play, a contrast which not only consists in the juxtaposition of the two unequal sisters within the tetralogy, but is built into the basic structure of satyr drama, confronting the heroic figures of tragedy in their richly decorated costumes with the naked and ithyphallic satyrs. The clash of the two totally different worlds generates and structures dramatic situations and actions, as well as determining tone and atmosphere, and so constitutes a rich source of a play's humour.

10. *Function(s)*

The question of the functions of satyr-drama has been posed since antiquity.¹⁴⁶ For a long time modern criticism simply repeated the ancient thesis that its purpose was relaxation and entertainment (*diachysis/relaxatio*), and there can be no doubt that, after three emotionally and morally complex and disturbing tragedies, comic relief will indeed have been an important effect of the light-hearted satyr play.¹⁴⁷ Against the tragic world, with its eternal, divine laws and its strict ethical code, satyr-drama, with the amoral vitality of the satyrs and their exuberant singing and dancing, their craving for wine and women and their ingenious dodging of any serious or dangerous planning, highlights its own idea of life: brighter, not forcing the audience to ponder what they should be, but encouraging them to be what they really are, or would like to be.

¹⁴⁵ The structural resemblance between *Ichneutae* and *Ajax* (diptychon) and the fact that both plays contain search scenes, does not suggest that the two plays were written for the same production, as Sutton (1980) 47 f. thinks; his reconstruction of several other such 'pairings' on the basis of the titles of lost plays (58 f.) is even more fanciful.

¹⁴⁶ For a short summary of current views, see Griffith (2002) 197–203; Lämmle (2011) 40–45.

¹⁴⁷ This is less true of Euripides than of Aeschylus and Sophocles.

In the last two decades, however, scholars have developed a number of different theories, stressing the social, cultural, and religious functions of satyr-drama. The remnants of Sophocles' satyr plays are so small that it is difficult to determine which of these theories would fit them best.¹⁴⁸ But it is clear that the cultic function, stressed already in antiquity and undisputed by modern critics, is an important aspect.

Chamaeleon, the pupil of Aristotle, reports that satyr-drama was added to tragedy at the end of the sixth century, when the audience complained that the plays produced at the City Dionysia had 'nothing to do with Dionysus' any more.¹⁴⁹ Satyr-drama brought back to the theatre the original simple and jolly character of the rural Dionysiac festivals.¹⁵⁰ The god himself does not seem to play an important role: the number of plays in which he appeared as a dramatic character is small.¹⁵¹ But Lämmle has recently shown that direct and indirect references to his absence let him appear—despite his absence from the action—as the secret centre of many plays.¹⁵² Within the dramatic

¹⁴⁸ The most important theories besides the two I have stressed are that of Lassère and Lissarague (cf. above p. 225), and the two significant modifications of their view by Voelke (2001) and Griffith (2002) and (2005a): 'The audience is presented simultaneously with two kinds of male fantasy: one high, the other low, but both wholeheartedly endorsed the dramatic logic of satyr-drama. The parallel universes of heroic and satyric experience enable the spectator's fantasy, in psychoanalytic terms, to experience simultaneously both the adult attainment of the symbolic order ... and the uninterrupted continuation of infantile, pre-Oedipal desires, emblemized by the small erect phallos of the satyrs and their restless physical movements, and confirmed by their inability to ever grow up, learn anything useful, take care of themselves, or even fully master normal (adult) patterns of speech' (2005, 174f.). Hall (1999) argues that 'satyr drama offered an aitiological justification for Athenian phallocentrism. "We were all satyrs together once, and wasn't it fun?", the plays seem to me to shout noisily to the men of Athens'; this theory appears to isolate one aspect (of different importance for different authors and plays) to the exclusion of others which are at least as important. The remnants of Sophocles' satyr plays offer little that would affirm the thesis.

¹⁴⁹ Chamaeleon fr. 38 Wehrli: 'When satyrika about Dionysus began to be replaced by tragedies on other themes, the audiences shouted: (this has) Nothing to do with Dionysus!'; cf. also Zenobius 5.40; Apostolius 13.42; Photius s.v., and *Suda* s.v.; Seaford (1984) 11–16 and 29. Seaford has stressed that this explanation accords well with Aristotle's account of early tragedy and is further supported by strikingly similar developments in Japanese and early English drama.

¹⁵⁰ Welcker (1826) 325–332; Rossi (1972).

¹⁵¹ There is some pictorial evidence for early satyr plays on myths, in which Dionysus (and the satyrs) traditionally played a part (Krumeich/Pechstein/Seidensticker 1999, 58f. [Krumeich]), and Aeschylus wrote a number of satyr plays on the adventures and achievements of Dionysus [*Lycurgus*, *Trophoi*, *Propompoi*(?)]. But there is only one Sophoclean satyr play about Dionysus (*Dionysiscus*) and none by Euripides.

¹⁵² Lämmle (2007) and (2011).

action the Chorus of satyrs and Silenus impersonate and represent the Dionysiac world in all its facets: music and dancing, wine and sexual licence, as well as the liberation from the many different forms of physical and psychological restraints.¹⁵³ When the Chorus of satyrs in the *parodos* danced into the orchestra, the god of the festival and his world were moved back into the centre of the tetralogy. In this sense satyr-drama and its protagonist, the Chorus of satyrs, are not just a jolly appendix to tragedy, added to provide comic relief, but the very heart of the dramatic performances.¹⁵⁴

We possess so little of Sophocles' satyr plays that it is impossible to be certain about their nature and quality.¹⁵⁵ But our survey permits the conclusion that the first editor of our only large fragment may have well identified the tone and atmosphere not only of *Ichneutae*, which he credits with a 'general air of light-heartedness and good humour', but of Sophoclean satyr-drama as a whole.¹⁵⁶ A touch of romance seems to have been another major component.¹⁵⁷ To speak in Northrop Frye's terms: Sophoclean satyr-drama, after tragedy's myth of autumn, presented the myth of spring.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ Seaford has gone one step further. On the basis of what he considers the most common recurrent themes of the genre (cf. above n30), he has suggested that 'unlike tragedy satyr-play retained its Dionysiac content', and did this 'not only through retaining a Chorus of satyrs, but also by virtue of its choice and adaptation of non-Dionysiac myths'. In a couple of articles and in the introduction to his excellent commentary on *Cyclops* he argues that the most recurrent feature of satyr-play—captivity, servitude, and liberation of the satyrs—dramatizes, or perhaps rather recalls, in ever new variations 'a sacred story of the Dionysiac mysteries, in which the imprisonment and miraculous liberation of Dionysos (perhaps also of his followers), comparable to the Eleusinian loss and reappearance of Kore, was an important element'. It is here that he finds 'the pre-theatrical origin of the theatrical theme of the captivity and liberation of the thiasos of satyrs, perhaps also of their wretched, but temporary separation from Dionysos'. Seaford further argues that the many marvellous inventions and creations (and the recurrent anodos-scenes) presented in satyr plays ultimately derive 'from a predramatic celebration by the Dionysiac thiasos of revelations associated with their cult (musical instruments? masks? wine? anodos?)', and he tries to show that other important *topoi* of the genre—as e.g. athletics, *paidotrophia*, and marriage—can perhaps be related to specific ritual features of the Anthesteria, the most ancient of the Attic festivals of Dionysus (Thuc. 2.15).

¹⁵⁴ Easterling (1997c).

¹⁵⁵ According to Pausanias (2.13.6) Aeschylus' satyr plays were considered the best (cf. also Diog. Laert. 2.133), whereas Pratinas and his son Aristias won the second prize.

¹⁵⁶ *POxy* IX [Hunt] 1912, 34; Radt (1982) 204 f.

¹⁵⁷ Griffith (2006).

¹⁵⁸ Frye (1957) essay III.

PART II

SOPHOCLEAN INTERTEXTUALITY

THE HOMER OF TRAGEDY: EPIC SOURCES AND MODELS IN SOPHOCLES

John Davidson

1. *Introduction*

The benign shadow of Homer hovers over all subsequent Greek literature as successive generations of authors have sought to establish themselves in relation to the master. As far as genre is concerned, lyric poetry is the first link in this chain, but it is tragedy which forges the strongest link and directs the chain into later antiquity and beyond. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides all made distinctive contributions to this process. Although in some ways the least 'Homeric' of the three, Euripides nevertheless engaged innovatively with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in a number of his tragedies.¹ In the case of Aeschylus, we have on record his remark, reported by Athenaeus (8.347e), that his plays were merely slices from Homer's great banquets, and some have argued that it is he who is consistently closest to Homeric diction.² It is Sophocles, however, who is generally considered to hold the place of honour in this company, although this is not invariably the case since, for example, he is missing (along with Aeschylus) from the list of 'Ομηρικῶτατοι given in the ancient treatise *On the Sublime* ([Longinus] 13.3), a list consisting of Herodotus, Stesichorus, Archilochus, and Plato.

A number of ancient *testimonia*, however, do attest to Sophocles' special relationship with Homer, the best known being the judgement attributed to a certain Polemon, as found in Diogenes Laertius (4.20) and the *Suda* lexicon, that Homer was the epic Sophocles and Sophocles the tragic Homer. Then too Eustathius, Bishop of Thessalonica in the 12th century, who had previously written extensive commentaries on the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, frequently calls Sophocles φιλόμηρος ('lover of Homer') or ὁ τοῦ Ὁμήρου ζηλωτής ('fanatical follower of Homer') and variations on this. Eustathius can also

¹ See e.g. Lange (2002).

² Sideras (1971) 12.

specifically point to cases where Sophocles employs the Homeric form of a word rather than the Attic one. One example of this is his use of *πτύον* for a winnowing-fan (fr. 1084 Radt; cf. *Il.* 13.588) instead of the Attic *πτέον*, another being his choice for a mound of *κολώνη* (*El.* 894; cf. *Il.* 2.811) rather than *κολωνός*. Eustathius also notes contexts in which Sophocles imitates, adapts, or paraphrases Homer, while one ancient biography of Homer, attributed to Plutarch, quotes a Homeric passage (*Il.* 3.65), alongside Sophocles' variation on the same (fr. 964 Radt).

There is no doubting, then, a recurring awareness throughout antiquity of Sophocles' debt to Homer. The issue is, however, more complicated than this. For a start, Athenaeus (7.277e) records a remark by a certain Zoilus that 'Sophocles took delight in the Epic Cycle, so as to compose whole dramas following its plot-line'. This moves the main focus of Sophocles' interest away from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and furthermore accords with what we can deduce from the titles of many of the lost plays (not to mention the subject matter of the extant ones), taken in conjunction with what we know about Epic Cycle works such as the *Cypria*, *Little Iliad*, and *Iliou Persis*, especially from the much later summaries of Proclus.³ We shall consider this issue further below.

A further complication arises in the most developed ancient discussion of the subject, which is a section of the anonymous *Life* of Sophocles. This begins with a somewhat unclear statement which one translator renders as 'In general he used Homeric vocabulary'.⁴ This translation may be correct, though it rather stretches the Greek ('Ὅμηρικώς ὠνόμαξε'). Emendation has therefore plausibly been suggested,⁵ either through the substitution of a verb which would create the sense 'He organized (or managed) his work along Homeric lines', or by changing both words so as to read 'Ὅμηρικὸς ὠνομάζετο' ('He was called Homeric') which would accord with other ancient judgements. Be that as it may, whether or not the author of the *Life* meant to say 'he used Homeric vocabulary', there is certainly no doubting the accuracy of such a statement. We have already seen some examples noted by ancient critics. Let us now consider a further selection.

³ See e.g. West (2003).

⁴ Lefkowitz (1981) 162.

⁵ See Radt (1983) 199.

2. Homeric Language

At the beginning of *Ajax*, probably Sophocles' earliest surviving tragedy, Odysseus confirms to the unseen Athena that he is indeed on the trail of Ajax himself whom he designates by the epithet *σακεσφόρος* ('shield-bearer'). A connection with the *Iliad* was made already by the ancient Scholiast who acutely stated that the epithet is not simply a variation on the more general 'arms-bearer' but alludes specifically to the formulaic description of the hero in the *Iliad* as 'bearing a shield like a battlement tower'. The description occurs first at *Iliad* 7.219, the next line further characterizing the shield as 'made of bronze with seven bulls'-hides'. The basic formula minus the further elaboration is then repeated at *Iliad* 11.485 and 17.128. Sophocles, moreover, also echoes the elaboration when, later in the play, he makes Ajax order his son Eurysaces (the name means 'broad shield') to take possession of his shield 'made of seven hides' (576). The possible significance of this we shall consider further below.⁶

In the *parodos* of *Antigone*, the entering Chorus evoke, in highly poetic language, a picture of the battle just won by the Theban defenders against the attacking Argive army. There are numerous Homeric echoes, as might be expected given that the *Iliad* provides the original source for battle descriptions in Greek poetry. Central to the Chorus' vision of the battle is their comparison of the Argives to a swooping eagle. This immediately evokes the *Iliad* where individuals, groups of warriors, and entire armies are likened to animals or birds. More specifically, Sophocles characterizes the eagle/army as *ὀξεᾶ κλάζων* ('loudly screaming'). In likening first the advancing Greeks and then the Trojans to birds, Homer uses the words *κλαγγηδόν* (*Il.* 2.463) and *κλαγγῇ* (*Il.* 3.2) respectively in the sense of 'with loud cries'. He also associates forms of the verb *κλάζω* with Agamemnon (*Il.* 11.168), Hector (*Il.* 11.344, 13.755), and the duelling Patroclus and Sarpedon (*Il.* 16.429) who are likened to vultures. Moreover, the expression *ὀξεᾶ κεκλήγοντες* is used of the Trojans (*Il.* 12.125), while *ὀξεᾶ κεκληγώς* is applied to Hector (*Il.* 17.88). Sophocles can thus be seen drawing directly on what may be described as Homer's poetic database.

Sophocles' battle scene contains further Homeric contexts. For instance, the Argive eagle is pitted against the Theban dragon. Although at one level we are probably dealing with heraldic symbolism of the two cities, at

⁶ See also Davidson (2006a) 26–31.

another level it is tempting to posit a connection with the Homeric portent of the eagle and snake (*Il.* 12.200 ff.), especially since a form of the verb κλάζω is applied to the eagle (*Il.* 12.207) as it flies away wounded, having dropped the snake to the ground. In addition, immediately after being described as ὀξέα κεκληγώς, Hector is likened to the flame of Hephaestus (*Il.* 17.88). It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that this association somehow led to Sophocles' use of the proper name Hephaestus (*Ant.* 123) to represent fire in the descriptive sequence initiated by ὀξέα κλάζων (*Ant.* 112). Even more compelling is Sophocles' use of the expression ἵπποκόμοις κορύθουσιν ('helmets with horsehair plumes'), referring literally to the invading Argive army. This is a clear echo of the Homeric ἵπποκόμου κόρυθες (*Il.* 13.132, 16.216) and ἵπποκόμου κόρυθος (*Il.* 16.338). Such contexts and others in the *Antigone parodos* clearly testify to Sophocles' adoption and adaptation of Homeric vocabulary, even if in some cases via other poetic intermediaries.

The opening lines of the fourth *stasimon* of *Antigone* also provide a striking point of contact with Homer. The Chorus are singing a song of consolation for the heroine who is about to be entombed in a rocky cavern. They offer three parallels from mythology, involving figures also shut away though in different 'prisons' and for different reasons. The ancient scholia miss the Homeric precedent, but modern commentators certainly do not, drawing attention to an incident in the *Iliad* in which the goddess Dione offers consolation to her daughter Aphrodite who has been wounded in battle by Diomedes. Like the Chorus of *Antigone*, Dione offers three mythical *paradeigmata* to comfort Aphrodite. That in itself, of course, would not be sufficient to prove that Sophocles was using Homer as his source. However, the Sophoclean *stasimon* begins (*Ant.* 944) with the word ἔτλα ('she endured'—the subject Danae follows). Especially given its prominent position, ἔτλα is clearly meant to echo the sequence τέτλαθι ... τλήμεν ... τλή ... τλή ... τλή (*Iliad* 5.382–395) in which Dione tells Aphrodite to 'take courage' because 'we (divinities) have suffered', as Ares, Hera, and Hades also suffered at the hands of various adversaries. Moreover, Danae's place of confinement is said to be a 'brass-fastened dwelling' (*Ant.* 945) which clearly echoes the situation of Ares who, like Danae, is the first of the three parallels mentioned. Homer has Ares 'fastened in strong fastenings' (*Il.* 5.386) and 'fastened in a brass jar' (*Il.* 5.387). We shall consider below some possible implications of Sophocles' 'imitation' of Homer here.

3. *Homeric Models for Extended Passages*

As we have seen, the section of the anonymous *Life* of Sophocles dealing with Homer may or may not have begun 'In general he used Homeric vocabulary'. It certainly continues with the words 'He took his plots from the direction set by the epic poet',⁷ or 'He carried his plots along the path taken by the (epic) poet'. This, however, immediately raises several problems. Firstly, it appears to conflict with Zoilus' comment that Sophocles composed whole dramas following the plot-line of the Epic Cycle. Secondly, it is clearly at odds with the fact that *Ajax*, *Electra*, and *Philoctetes* derive their plots from the Trojan part of the Epic Cycle. Thirdly, the Theban subject matter of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone* indicates an ultimate Theban epic source for the plots (or at least for aspects of the plots) of the first two plays (while the plot of the third may be post-epic or even Sophoclean), and any epic source for the plot of *Trachiniae* would have to focus on Heracles. Finally, the titles of the lost plays clearly demonstrate that Homer was not the plot source for the great majority of them, whereas the Epic Cycle, especially the Trojan part of the Cycle, certainly was.

Naturally, attempts have been made to reconcile the apparent anomaly. One such attempt seeks to blur the distinction between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as the work of Homer on the one hand, and the poems of the Epic Cycle on the other, the argument being that the author of the *Life* would have regarded cyclic material as being the work of 'the poet' just as much as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.⁸ This seems unlikely, although it must be said that a number of the poems of the Epic Cycle *were* sometimes credited to Homer.

Another more recent attempt to deal with the issue accepts, albeit with considerable reluctance, an earlier explanation: namely that the author of the *Life* was asserting that Sophocles' method was to find plots for his plays in allusions within the Homeric poems to stories not only from the wider Trojan cycle but also from other parts of the epic tradition.⁹ Such an assertion is deemed to be forced, and the suggestion is made that his strategy was to try to make Sophocles seem as 'Homeric' as possible, perhaps in an attempt to champion one side of an ongoing argument, the other side of which promoted Sophocles' more obvious debt, at least as far as subject

⁷ Lefkowitz (1981) 162–163.

⁸ Pearson (1917) I. xxiii.

⁹ Radt (1983) 201–202.

matter was concerned, to the Epic Cycle. This is an interesting hypothesis, but it stretches credibility to think that the author of the *Life* believed that he could actually convince anyone that Sophocles would have relied on mere allusions to other epic stories in Homer when seeking material suitable for dramatization, rather than going directly to more detailed treatments of such stories in the Epic Cycle itself.

On this contentious issue there is a further important aspect to be explored, even if it is not what the author of the *Life* had in mind. This is the fact that in Sophoclean plays whose plots are certainly not taken from Homer, there are significant passages, parts of scenes, or even whole scenes which appear to have direct Homeric models. Let us consider a few of these.

One of the most vivid messenger narratives in Sophocles is the description by the old slave in *Electra* of the chariot race in which Orestes has supposedly been killed (*El.* 680–763). This account is especially rich in Homeric colouring, not least because it is in a sense an abbreviated and modified version of the description of the chariot race in Book 23 of the *Iliad*, the race held as part of the funeral games for Patroclus. It is beyond the scope of the present study to discuss all the linguistic echoes of the Iliadic passage. What we shall focus on are thematic elements clearly modelled on the Homeric account.

The Sophoclean competitors are introduced briefly, Sophocles in this regard following Homer's introduction of Meriones (*Il.* 23.351), the other Homeric competitors being announced with more elaboration, in some cases quite extensive. One of the Sophoclean competitors is an Aetolian 'with chestnut colts', Sophocles' choice of this epithet for Aetolian horses quite possibly resulting from the fact that in the Iliadic account one of the spectators, Idomeneus, recognizes one of the horses of Diomedes (whom he specifically characterizes as Aetolian—*Il.* 23.471) on account of its predominantly reddish-brown colour (*Il.* 23.454). Then too, the procedure of casting lots for position in the race (*El.* 710) is similar to that used at *Iliad* 23.352, while the detail offered at the start of the race by which the drivers shout to their horses and shake the reins (*El.* 711–713) recalls the description of the start of the Iliadic race (*Il.* 23.362–364). In particular, Sophocles' use of ὁμοκλήσαντες ('shouting'), an epicism found only here in tragedy, directly echoes ὁμόκλησαν from the Iliadic account.

As the race proceeds, a general picture of close pursuit (*El.* 715–719) is offered, which is a development of Diomedes' pursuit of Eumelus (*Il.* 23.379–381). Furthermore, Orestes' tactic in the race, by which he keeps his horses near the pillar at the turning point of the course (*El.* 720–722), is the very tactic which Nestor advises Antilochus to adopt (*Il.* 23.322 ff. and 334 ff.).

Orestes also drives at the rear of the field, waiting for the chance to gain an advantage going round the turn (*El.* 720–722), which is precisely the other piece of advice which Nestor offers his son (*Il.* 23.344–345). As the race nears the end, Orestes is neck and neck with the Athenian, a situation which replicates the close rivalry of Eumelus and Diomedes, as well as that of Antilochus and Menelaus. Finally, Orestes' fall from his chariot is a more complicated and tragic version of the fate of Eumelus (*Il.* 23.391 ff.), and in striking the end of the pillar he has fallen victim to the main danger which Nestor identifies as arising from the tactic he suggests (*Il.* 23.340–341).

Less obvious but nevertheless a distinct possibility is a connection between particular scenes in *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the opening sequences of the first Book of the *Iliad*.¹⁰ The scenes in question are those in which a king (Creon in the first instance and Oedipus in the second) angrily rejects the information and advice of the blind seer Teiresias. It has been argued that the epic model for these scenes, at least with regard to the motif of the defiance of prophecy as such, is Hector's ill-tempered denial of the interpretation offered by Polydamas of the eagle and snake portent in the twelfth Book of the *Iliad*.¹¹ This in itself is highly likely. However, in terms of the overall dramatic shaping and operation of the Sophoclean scenes, as opposed to this particular motif, the first Book of the *Iliad* seems a closer match. It is not just the interaction between Agamemnon and Calchas, as suggested by the ancient Scholiast in connection with the scene in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which is relevant here, but rather the combination of Agamemnon's encounters with Chryses, Calchas, and Achilles in turn.

The reason for Chryses' appearance and confrontation with Agamemnon is very different, of course, from the reasons for the entry of Teiresias in the Sophoclean plays. However, like Teiresias a servant of Apollo, he comes as an isolated outsider into the midst of a public gathering presided over by a king. The Achaean army surrounds Agamemnon, as the Chorus representing the city of Thebes support Creon and Oedipus. Moreover, the attitude of the Homeric Achaeans is one of ambivalence—they sympathize with Chryses' request for the release of his daughter, but are obliged to endorse Agamemnon's refusal. In a similar way, the Sophoclean choruses show some sympathy towards Teiresias while at the same time being forced to support their king, at least initially.

¹⁰ See further in Davidson (1997).

¹¹ Bushnell (1988) 31–35, 56–66, 74–78.

There is a context of plague or pollution, either operative or foreshadowed, in all three situations. Agamemnon abuses Chryses, calls him old (*Il.* 1.26) and warns him that Apolline appurtenances may not be of any help to him (*Il.* 1.28), just as Oedipus insults Teiresias, mocking his blindness (e.g. *OT* 371) and age (*OT* 402) and undermining his effectiveness as a prophet (*OT* 390), and just as Creon taunts him with age (*Ant.* 1033, 1045) and attacks the integrity of prophets in general (e.g. *Ant.* 1055).

There are, of course, also important differences between the Iliadic scene and the Sophoclean ones, including the point that Teiresias is, as it were, the 'official' Theban prophet, whereas Chryses has no such status. This is where the second of the Iliadic scenes becomes relevant. Calchas, who responds to Achilles' suggestion that the Achaeans consult a prophet or priest to explain Apollo's anger as manifested in the plague, is more or less the official religious figure in the Achaean army. Calchas, however, like Chryses and unlike Teiresias in the Sophoclean plays, is frightened of the king, and justifiably so, since he feels the full force of Agamemnon's wrath and has his professional credentials questioned (*Il.* 1.106–107). It is left to Achilles to stand up to Agamemnon's rage and even threaten him with dire consequences for his stance, as Teiresias makes dire prophecies to Creon and Oedipus.

While it would be foolish to claim that the Sophoclean Teiresias is simply a composite figure consisting of the Homeric Chryses, Calchas, and Achilles, and while a number of other factors both Homeric (including the exchange between Polydamas and Hector) and otherwise are no doubt operative, it seems highly likely that what are in fact three separate incidents in the first Book of the *Iliad* have been forged by Sophocles into one much more complex scene in two of his extant plays.

A scene in *Ajax* can be shown to have an even clearer Iliadic model. This is the scene in which the hero's spear-bride Tecmessa unsuccessfully tries to deter him from committing suicide. The model in this case is Andromache's similarly unsuccessful attempt in the sixth Book of the *Iliad* to prevent Hector from returning to the battle where she rightly fears that he will be killed. Andromache, who is by the Scaean gate with their son Astyanax, pleads with Hector not to leave her a widow. Since all her own family are dead, Hector is everything to her (*Il.* 6.429–430). Hector feels pity for her, but he fears the shame that he would incur in Troy if he were to stay away from the fighting. At the same time, he predicts that Troy will one day be sacked, and he imagines Andromache being led away into slavery, his hope being that he will be dead and thus not compelled to witness this. He stretches out his arms to Astyanax, but the boy is frightened of his helmet with its horsehair

crest and shrinks away. He therefore removes the helmet, lays it on the ground, fondles his son, and prays that one day Astyanax will have an even greater reputation for military prowess than himself. He then gives the child back to Andromache and, though touched with pity, ends the encounter by reminding her that her place is in the home, while his is on the battlefield.

Like Hector, Ajax in the Sophoclean play cannot live with shame, which in his case he has already incurred. Again like Hector, he is deaf to Tecmessa's entreaties. Tecmessa herself, although not Ajax's wife, is, like Andromache, entirely dependent on her man and, like Andromache, has lost her entire family. Sophocles varies the exchange between the man and the woman in subtle ways. Thus, whereas in the Homeric passage it is Hector who imagines the dispassionate words of someone seeing Andromache weeping in slavery, in the Sophoclean play Tecmessa imagines the taunting words of an onlooker after Ajax's death as part of the emotional pressure which she brings to bear. Ajax calls for their young son whom Tecmessa has left under the supervision of servants. When the boy is brought, Ajax says that this boy, if he is truly his son, will not be frightened by the blood of the animals which he has mistakenly killed. He then wishes that his son may prove more fortunate than himself but like him in every other respect. Finally, he orders the boy to take his famous ox-hide shield and rebukes Tecmessa for her typically female attitude. The basic Homeric scene and its chief motifs are all here, but Sophocles has adapted it to suit the different characters and the different situation. Some of the possible implications of his adaptation will be considered below.

4. *The Special Status of the Odyssey*

The examples given so far have all been from the *Iliad*. When we turn to the *Odyssey*, we once again encounter a problem in the *Life* discussion whose third statement is that Sophocles 'drew on the *Odyssey* for many of his dramas'¹² or perhaps that 'he showed his debt to the *Odyssey* in many dramas'. The first question is why the *Odyssey* in particular is picked out and the *Iliad* ignored. The second question is whether the author is still talking about plots or not.

With regard to the second question, it seems unlikely that the *Life* author can still be talking about plots, since out of all his plays Sophocles seems to have employed large-scale story motifs from the *Odyssey* only in his

¹² Lefkowitz (1981) 163.

Nausicaa and *Niptra* and perhaps also his *Phaiaces*. It thus seems at least an initially promising approach to conclude instead that the *Life* author here has in mind Sophocles' frequent echoes of individual Odyssean features, motifs, expressions and so on;¹³ one example of this is then noted—an etymology for Odysseus' name (fr. 965 Radt) as already provided by Homer (*Od.* 19.406–408).

The author immediately draws attention to Sophocles' skill in delineating character which he says replicates 'Homeric charm', and adds that, as a result of this, 'a certain Ionian' said that only Sophocles was a disciple of Homer. The passage as a whole is somewhat confused, because it then loses sight of Homer, commenting that Sophocles was called 'the bee' because he was the only poet who could cull the best from each of his predecessors and contemporaries rather than just imitating one of them. Key elements of Sophocles' style are then listed and a further comment is made about his mastery of characterization.

All this does seem to suggest, then, that it was Sophocles' style in general which the author had in mind when picking out the *Odyssey* as his key model. There is still a problem, however, because, as we have already seen, the Homeric colouring in Sophocles is by no means confined to the *Odyssey*, and it is interesting to note that it is actually the *Iliad* which provides Eustathius with so many of his Sophoclean Homerisms, although it must be admitted that the critic's *Iliad* commentary is by far the longer. Be that as it may, let us now consider some important motifs and scenes from the *Odyssey* which appear to have provided models for Sophocles.

In the third Book of the *Odyssey*, Telemachus arrives in Pylos and asks Nestor for news of his father, specifically requesting to learn the manner of his death, since at this juncture he is afraid that he *has* died (*Od.* 3.79–101). In reply, Nestor is led to recall the sufferings experienced by himself and the other Greeks at Troy. He then provides a short list of those deemed 'the best' (*Od.* 3.108) who fell at Troy—Ajax, Achilles, Patroclus, and his own son Antilochus. Telemachus' questioning thus elicits a strong emotional response from him.

It so happens that both Euripides and Sophocles echo this passage, Euripides in *Iphigeneia in Tauris* and *Helen*, and Sophocles in *Philoctetes*. There are differences in the dramatists' handling of the motif, of course, brought about by the different situations and characters involved. In the Sophoclean

¹³ Radt (1983) 199.

case, there is an added complexity resulting from the fact that Philoctetes' questioning of Neoptolemus about the fortunes of the Greeks at Troy is broken up by a partly fictitious narrative on the part of Neoptolemus (*Phil.* 343–390) which is followed immediately by a short lyric response from the Chorus (*Phil.* 391–402). The case for a Homeric model for the question and answer sequences in this play (*Phil.* 319–342 and 403–452), however, is especially strong, since the list of fallen warriors—Achilles, Ajax, Antilochus, and Patroclus—is identical with that offered by Nestor in the *Odyssey*.¹⁴

It is beyond question that the recognition scenes of the *Odyssey* are a model for similar plots and scenes in Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Moreover, it has been rightly emphasized that the scene in *Odyssey* Book 21 where Odysseus makes himself known to Eumaeus and Philoetius lies directly behind those scenes in tragedy in which a stop must be put to the celebration of recognition and reunion because the work of revenge is yet to be undertaken and danger lurks all around.¹⁵

In *Electra*, after the heroine is joyfully reunited with her brother, Orestes constantly warns her to restrain herself, and not lose sight of the perilous nature of their situation. There is a variation here from the Homeric scenario, where Odysseus' warning quickly cuts short the emotional response to the recognition, and there is another difference in that, whereas Odysseus is fully in command of the situation, Orestes asks his sister for guidance (*El.* 1293–1295).

In the *Odyssean* passage, the hero is afraid that someone might come out of the palace and take the conspirators by surprise. Sophocles makes this possibility a reality, causing the old slave to appear from inside to chastise the siblings and warn them of the danger. The old slave, in fact, is similar to Odysseus himself, in that he leaves the palace, demands an end to the celebration, issues a warning, and then explains the situation inside and the steps he has already taken (*El.* 1339–1345). Sophocles thus makes him partly assume the avenger's mantle. At the same time, his advanced age makes him similar to Laertes in another of the *Odyssey* recognition scenes, that in Book 24, and like Laertes he expresses his own fears. Sophocles has combined different but related scenes from the *Odyssey* to suit his dramatic purposes.¹⁶

¹⁴ See further in Davidson (2006b).

¹⁵ See e.g. Matthiessen (1964) 99.

¹⁶ See further in Davidson (2000).

5. *Plot Patterns in the Odyssey*

Significant points of contact between a number of Sophocles' plays and broader patterns in the *Odyssey* can also be demonstrated. It has been noted, for example, that in *Oedipus at Colonus* the wandering Oedipus' opening question as to his whereabouts matches Odysseus' similar formulaic question when he arrives at both Phaeacia (*Od.* 6.119) and Ithaca (*Od.* 13.200).¹⁷ Even more palpable Odyssean models can be seen in *Trachiniae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Electra*, and to these we now turn.

To begin with, striking parallels can be identified between themes in the *Odyssey* and in *Trachiniae*. Indeed, a good case has been made for the view that it would have been the *nostos* of Odysseus which had a special resonance for the original *Trachiniae* audience,¹⁸ even though that would also have been in tension with the circumstances of the *Oresteia*.¹⁹ Odysseus had instructed Penelope, in the event of his failure to return home, to remarry only when Telemachus grew a beard (*Od.* 18.257–270). Similarly, Deianeira had been told by Heracles to take her share of the marriage-property if he was dead after a specific fifteen-month period (*Trach.* 155–168). The prescribed time brings a crisis in each case, the heroines take the crucial steps to deal with it, and the absent heroes duly return, in one case ultimately triumphant, in the other case falsely heralded as triumphant. There are, however, significant contrasts in detail, but the Odyssean model may well have had the effect of highlighting Sophocles' variations on the theme.

The faithful Penelope can be seen as a kind of model for Sophocles' innocent Deianeira. Moreover, Penelope is harassed by unwanted suitors, just as Deianeira experiences the unwelcome courtship of Acheloüs, situations resolved by the women's respective hero husbands. In addition, the husbands have been delayed by dalliances with exotic women, Odysseus with Calypso, and Heracles with Omphale, Heracles also having more recently become involved with another foreign woman, Iole, whom he is actually bringing home. And though there are clear differences of detail, Hyllus, like Telemachus, goes off in search of his father.²⁰

¹⁷ Di Benedetto (1983) 217 ff.

¹⁸ Fowler (1999) 161–165.

¹⁹ Segal (1986) 57–58.

²⁰ See further in Davidson (2003).

The idea that the *Odyssey* provides important thematic models for *Trachiniae* is supported by numerous linguistic parallels (there are a number involving the *Iliad* as well), even if commentators sometimes stretch plausibility in this regard.²¹ Especially striking is Deianeira's comment about the sheltered life of a girl before she assumes the cares of marriage and motherhood, to which a range of Homeric expressions, mainly from the *Odyssey*, appear to have contributed, though it has been argued that the image in *Iliad* 17.53–58 is most influential in this particular case.²² Then too, aspects of Heracles' behaviour and situation clearly recall details of the Cyclops incident in *Odyssey* Book 9, such as the horrible death of Lichas, and the verbal echoes associated with a prophecy and its fulfilment (*Trach.* 822–823, 1141, and *Od.* 9.507). Heracles' first words after regaining consciousness from his coma also clearly echo Odysseus' formulaic utterance when he wakes up in both Scheria and Ithaca (*Od.* 6.119–121, 13.200–202).

Although the basic story of Philoctetes' retrieval from Lemnos comes from the cyclic *Little Iliad*, and possibly other cyclic epic sources as well,²³ Sophocles' tragedy on the subject alludes in important ways to the *Iliad*, especially with regard to moral issues associated with Neoptolemus, Achilles, and Odysseus,²⁴ but even more so to the *Odyssey* for a range of thematic material. The very landscape of Lemnos, as Sophocles presents it, with its rocks and headlands, evokes the coastal landscape experienced by Odysseus in the course of his wandering.

The central feature of Philoctetes' environment is his cave, and verbal echoes alone forge a clear link with the cave of the Cyclops in *Odyssey* Book 9.²⁵ A comparison between the inhabitants of the two caves and their different relationships to Odysseus is also invited, not to mention the question of what constitutes savagery and barbarism and what civilization.²⁶ Moreover, Philoctetes' cave functions in relation to a range of other Odyssean caves, or quasi-caves, such as the temporary shelter into which the marooned Odysseus crawls when he comes ashore at Scheria in *Odyssey* Book 5. This refuge is protected from wind, sun, and rain, whereas access to the sun in winter and breezes in summer are attractive features of Philoctetes' cave as described by Odysseus himself (*Phil.* 17–19). On the other

²¹ Garner (1990) 101–102, 107–108, 239n3, 240n17.

²² Ferrari (1988).

²³ Schnebele (1988).

²⁴ Schein (2006).

²⁵ Garner (1990) 147–148.

²⁶ Levine (2003).

hand, Philoctetes' cave is also exposed to bad weather (*Phil.* 1456–1457). In addition, Neoptolemus describes Philoctetes' bed of leaves, a description which echoes the similar bed which Odysseus makes for himself in his temporary shelter.

The cave of the Naiads on Ithaca where Odysseus stores his treasure in *Odyssey* Book 13 is also highly relevant to Philoctetes' cave. It has running water, just as Philoctetes' cave is near a spring, though this spring, which plays no dramatic function in the play, may primarily owe its existence to the spring associated with the cave on the uninhabited island close to the land of the Cyclopes. However, the most distinctive feature of Philoctetes' cave, its two entrances, is almost certainly designed to recall the cave of the Naiads which possesses the same characteristic. In general, it seems clear that a range of caves and quasi-caves in the *Odyssey* serve as a model for the Sophoclean cave, highlighting the contrast between the fortunes and behaviour of Philoctetes and Odysseus.²⁷

Much further thematic material links the *Philoctetes* closely to the *Odyssey*, including the motif of maturing young men (Neoptolemus and Telemachus)²⁸ and their relationship to famous bows. Similar links can be demonstrated between the *Odyssey* and *Electra*. Indeed, there is an immediate association between Orestes and Telemachus in that on several occasions in the *Odyssey* it is precisely Orestes who is held up to Telemachus as the model of appropriate filial behaviour. However, we shall here concentrate instead on the similarities between Orestes and Odysseus and the patterns of return, recognition, and revenge in the two works.²⁹

As Orestes receives important help from the old slave, so Odysseus does from, among others, the old swineherd Eumaeus who is ordered to guard the postern gate (*Od.* 22.129–130), while the old slave keeps a look-out at the palace door. After the recognition, Orestes has his sister to help him with the murder plans, as Odysseus has his son as his primary assistant. In the Sophoclean play, of course, it is Electra who is the central character, and there are clear echoes of the situation of Penelope in her lonely vigils and grief, although the general prototype for such strongly determined 'Sophoclean heroes' is the Iliadic Achilles.³⁰ She suffers insults from her mother and Aegisthus, whose sexual relationship mirrors the actual relationship of the hubristic suitors with the maids, and their desired relationship with

²⁷ See further in Davidson (1995).

²⁸ Fuqua (1976) 32–62; Whitby (1996).

²⁹ See further in Davidson (1988). Cf. Bernard-Moulin (1966) 156–158.

³⁰ Knox (1964).

Penelope. As the suitors plot to murder Telemachus, so Aegisthus and Clytaemestra plan to remove Electra permanently. The disguised Athena's advice to Telemachus to exact vengeance from the suitors themselves if he confirms his father's death (*Od.* 1.249 ff.) is possibly even the formal model for Electra's decision to carry on with the murder of the usurpers once Orestes is reported dead. Electra's rejection of Chrysothemis' 'proof' that Orestes has arrived mirrors Penelope's initial rejection of Eurycleia's news about Odysseus' presence (*Od.* 23.10 ff.).

It is perhaps in the prologue of Sophocles' play, however, that the most palpable echoes of the *Odyssey* can be detected. Despite the dismissal of the idea by the ancient Scholiast, a comparison between Orestes' arrival in his homeland and Odysseus' return to Ithaca is most instructive. Athena points out landmarks to Odysseus (*Od.* 13.344 ff.) as the old slave shows the features of Argos to Orestes. Although in the *Odyssey* it is Athena who suggests the plan of action, but Orestes in the Sophoclean play, the old slave's words emphasizing the need for action (*El.* 21–22) clearly recall those of Athena (*Od.* 13.365). Other intertextual connections include Odysseus' prayer to the local nymphs as mirrored by Orestes' prayer to the gods of his fatherland. There is also Orestes' report of his visit to the Delphic oracle which sets up a contrast between the use of guile as opposed to open force, and which in turn echoes a number of expressions in the *Odyssey* offering precisely these alternatives, including that used by the unrecognized Odysseus himself, firstly to Eumaeus and later to Penelope, when reporting that Odysseus had consulted the oracle at Dodona as to 'how he might return to rich Ithaca after such a long time away, whether openly or in secret' (*Od.* 14.329–330 and 19.298–299).

Many further examples could be added from *Electra*, and the other extant plays as well. The evidence presented even in this brief summary, however, surely demonstrates the importance of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as models for the extant plays of Sophocles. The fact that the author of the *Life* privileges the *Odyssey* as Sophocles' source remains something of a mystery, though it does perhaps appear that the *Odyssey* provides a greater number of thematic models. There always remains the possibility that the biographer focused on the *Odyssey* because he was rather thinking in terms of Sophocles' skill in character portrayal and because he assumed the same general distinction between the *Iliad* as παθητικός and the *Odyssey* as ἡθικός as Aristotle had done in the *Poetics* (1459b).³¹

³¹ See Davidson (1994) 377–378.

6. *Concluding Remarks*

It is relatively easy to show that Sophocles often modelled himself on the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* with regard to both language and thematic material. There is no reason to contradict the common ancient view that the playwright could be 'Homeric' in his linguistic usage, as well as in his skill in delineating character. In some cases, it may simply be that he was consciously acknowledging his debt to the master by drawing on words and phrases that Homer had canonized. In other cases, the process may well have been entirely unconscious, for the simple reason that Homer had, as it were, entered the Greek poetic bloodstream. One or other of these phenomena may be sufficient to explain, for example, the Homeric echoes discussed above in the *parodos* of *Antigone*.

An example such as the opening of the fourth *stasimon* of *Antigone*, however, is more complicated. Might Sophocles be doing more than just using linguistic echoes from a similar context of consolation? Perhaps he was making the point that, just as the Homeric Aphrodite had been wounded in a battlefield context where she did not belong, so Antigone had come to grief by entering the arena of a male political world inappropriate for *her*. Or again, perhaps the reminiscence of the quasi-comic Homeric context could be designed to highlight the contrast with the deadly serious situation in which Antigone finds herself.

That is an issue involving specific contexts. The more interesting question is whether on occasion there may be significant implications, arising from allusions to Homer, for the overall interpretation of Sophoclean plays. Recent scholarship has tended to promulgate the view that fifth-century tragedy in general reflects a delicate tension between the heroic or Homeric world and the world of contemporary Athens, and that the two worlds serve to redefine and shed light on each other.³² How, though, might this be seen to be operating through specific Sophoclean contexts?

Sophocles' use early in the play of the epithet *σακεσφόρος* to describe the hero of *Ajax* not only identifies the son of Telamon, but may also be seen to imply ironically in retrospect that the protective function of the huge Iliadic shield is no longer of use to Ajax's friends, let alone to the hero himself. Moreover, the epithet initiates a wealth of verbal reminiscences of the *Iliad*, not to mention one specific scene, as we have discussed above, modelled on

³² See e.g. Gould (1983); Goldhill (1986) 138–167.

a comparable scene from the Homeric epic. One interpretation of all this has been that Sophocles is emphasizing the fact that the old heroic code had finally disappeared with the demise of Ajax.³³ More typically, however, it has been thought that it is precisely the *differences* between the tragedy and its epic model as articulated by Sophocles, even with regard to the Ajax figure himself, that are most significant.³⁴

The interpretation of *Philoctetes* and *Electra* presents similar issues. In the former case, the reminiscences of the *Odyssey* may partly perhaps serve to underline the differences between the epic hero and the generally sympathetic presentation of his behaviour, and the amoral and ultimately discredited Odysseus of the fifth-century tragedy, although there is ample room for disagreement with such an approach. In the case of *Electra*, much depends on whether one stands on the 'light' or 'dark' side of the interpretative debate. Among the various approaches that take an optimistic view, it has even been argued that Sophocles specifically turned for inspiration to the version of Orestes' revenge as told in the *Odyssey* to avoid a head-on collision, so to speak, with the moral problems of the matricide.³⁵ At the other extreme the case has been argued in detail that Sophocles is essentially undercutting the Homeric vision.³⁶ The jury is still out on this question, but it must be noted that the persistence of Odyssean colouring in the play should at least make one pause before privileging the echoes of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* which are also undeniably present.

In conclusion, the point has been well emphasized that although the story of Ajax's shame and suicide comes from the cyclic *Little Iliad*, it is specifically the Ajax of the *Iliad* who is evoked by Sophocles.³⁷ The strong 'presence' of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* in *Philoctetes* suggests that in this case too Homer is the more significant source for Sophocles than the cyclic epic, and it is a reasonable guess that if we possessed the lost *Philoctetes at Troy*, for example, something similar would apply. Sophocles may well have drawn extensively on the Epic Cycle for his plots, but it was to Homer that he turned to develop in that light his own complexities and poetic richness. It is indeed fitting to call him 'the tragic Homer'.

³³ Knox (1961) 20–21 [= Knox (1979) 144].

³⁴ Kirkwood (1965); Easterling (1984); Goldhill (1986) 155–161; Winnington-Ingram (1980) 15–19.

³⁵ Jebb (1894) xli.

³⁶ Segal (1981a) 249–291.

³⁷ Kirkwood (1965) 62.

DYNAMIC ALLUSION IN SOPHOCLES

Francis M. Dunn

In *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Peter Burian discusses allusion under the heading of ‘mythological cross-references’, and distinguishes references to Homer and Homeric values from self-reflexive allusions to other tragedies.¹ He illustrates the former kind of allusion with the hero’s farewell to his wife and child in Sophocles’ *Ajax*, which recalls Hector’s scene with Andromache and Astyanax in the *Iliad*, Book 6—at the same time that it overturns the Homeric archetype of heroic duty. For the latter kind of allusion he offers two examples that border on parody: Eteocles in Euripides’ *Phoenician Women*, who dispenses with naming captains to each gate and thus replaces the fateful suspense of Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes* with human recklessness; and Electra in Euripides’ play, who rejects the tokens that identified Orestes in Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi*, thus replacing theatrical symbol with unflattering realism.

The distinction between drama’s allusions to epic and those to other dramas is an obvious one—bound up as the former are with the ancient authority of Homer, and the latter with the rivalry among fellow dramatists—and this distinction is reflected in the organization of the present volume. Yet whereas Burian emphasizes the metadramatic possibilities when one tragedy alludes to another, I want to explore here instead the narrative opportunities that arise. If we look at those cases where a Sophoclean drama alludes to another drama more than once—where, that is, allusion tends toward juxtaposing plots, not just words or phrases—we find what I call dynamic allusion. By this I mean a set of allusions that actively and progressively shapes expectations, using the course of events in a secondary drama to open up possible directions for the primary one.

My own approach can perhaps be spelled out more clearly by contrasting it with that of Stephen Hinds. In *Allusion and Intertext*, Hinds points out that the study of allusion tends to fix or freeze the source text:

¹ Burian (1997a) 193–196, quote from p. 193.

in the final analysis a systematic reading of one text will always preclude a systematic reading of the other. Such an imbalance ... may reflect nothing more (and nothing less) than a basic interpretive imperative felt by the Virgilian reader to 'freeze' Homer, to *hold him still* for a moment so that he can be contemplated from a Virgilian point of view.²

The problem that Hinds wants to address is the view of intertextuality as a one-way process, and he therefore proposes instead a two-way or dialogical relation between texts: not only does Ovid, for example, appropriate Vergil's poem to his own ends (hence a section of the *Metamorphoses* is often dubbed 'Ovid's *Aeneid*'), but he also casts Vergil's poem as anticipating his own (and so Hinds calls part of the *Aeneid* 'Virgil's *Metamorphoses*'). The issue I address is not the direction of allusion but its typically static nature; even in Hinds' approach, Ovid freezes Vergil and Vergil (for Ovid's readers) freezes Ovid.³ I shall consider instead more fluid kinds of allusion where texts interconnect in a single direction but do so incrementally, as a series of echoes shifts and shapes the direction of the plot. My four examples come from *Electra*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Ajax*, and as we shall see, the ways in which a given plot interacts with a prior drama differ from play to play.

1. *Electra*

In the prologue of *Electra*, Sophocles uses several devices to alert his audience to the differences between the play it is about to watch and Aeschylus' version of the same story. For example, the Tutor describes the scene as Mycene (9), not Argos, thus distancing the play from Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and perhaps anticipating a version of events closer to that of Homer.⁴ Less obviously but just as effectively, allusions likewise help to guide the spectators' expectations. Accordingly, the prologue of Sophocles' play consists of a short speech by the Tutor (1–22) answered by Orestes in a longer one (23–76), and both speeches include echoes of the *Oresteia*.

² Hinds (1998) 103 (his emphasis).

³ Allusion may thus be viewed as a static relation between single texts (thus Garner 1990 and Edmunds 2001) or a static relation of one text to the sum total of mythic plots (thus Segal 1983 and Lowe 2000).

⁴ On the play's many affinities with Homer, see Davidson (1988); it does not follow, as Jebb (1924) xli maintains, that Sophocles agrees with Homer that the murders are justified.

The Tutor's long description of the setting (2–10) culminates with the *skene*, which he identifies as the house of the Pelopidae: 'where we are arrived, know you behold golden Mycene and this the house of the Pelopidae drenched with blood', οἱ δ' ἰκάνομεν, / φάσκειν Μυκῆνας τὰς πολυχρύσους ὀρᾶν, / πολύφθορόν τε δῶμα Πελοπιδῶν τόδε (8–10).⁵ The Homeric associations of 'golden Mycene' are given added weight by the anaphora of epithets πολυχρύσους ... πολύφθορον arranged chiastically between their nouns,⁶ but the final words actually shift the source of allusion from Homer to Aeschylus: in *Choephoroi*, at the climax of the *kommos* in which the siblings summon the shade of their father, Electra asks the spirit to take pity on her grief (*Cho.* 502) and Orestes adds, 'and do not wipe out the seed of the Pelopidae', καὶ μὴ 'ξαλείψῃς σπέρμα Πελοπιδῶν τόδε (*Cho.* 503). The echo of Aeschylean language and rhythm in the phrase δῶμα Πελοπιδῶν τόδε arouses the expectation that Orestes' return to his home might involve something like the powerful convergence of brother, sister, and father's spirit in *Choephoroi*—an expectation that is soon voided when the two men in Sophocles turn away from the house and ignore Electra's laments, departing in the same way they had come.⁷ Frustration of the expectations associated with that *kommos* will become thematic: Agamemnon's tomb, we learn, is offstage and not visible; furthermore, the discovery of Orestes' offerings will be discredited by Electra rather than welcomed, and the reunion of the siblings will be delayed until late in the play.

The Tutor concludes his speech by observing that day has come (17–19) and this is the moment for action (22). His description of daylight as 'sun's bright gleam', λαμπρὸν ἡλίου σέλας (17), recalls Clytaemestra's explanation in *Agamemnon* that Troy has fallen, where she ascribes the light of the beacons to Hephaestus 'sending forth the bright gleam of Ida', Ἴδης λαμπρὸν ἐκπέμπων σέλας (*Agam.* 281); the allusion is strengthened by mention of day following night in both contexts, both using the word εὐφρόνη to denote night (19, *Agam.* 279).⁸ In *Agamemnon* as in *Electra* the appearance of light marks a symbolic, as well as a literal beginning to the action; yet whereas the λαμπρὸν σέλας in Aeschylus has been darkened by the forebodings of the Watchman and the apprehensions of the Chorus, in Sophocles it stirs

⁵ Sophocles' text is quoted from Lloyd-Jones/Wilson (1990); Aeschylus' text is quoted from West (1990). On the Tutor's description of the setting, see Dunn (2006).

⁶ So Kamerbeek (1974) *ad* 10.

⁷ On this detail of staging, see Dunn (2009b) 116–117.

⁸ On light imagery in the *Oresteia*, see Gantz (1977) and Ferrari (1997) 19–24.

‘the clear morning calls of the birds’, ἐὼα κινεῖ φθέγματ’ ὀρνίθων σαφή (18), in a lyrical vignette that promises to clear away the clouds of the older version. The allusion thus anticipates the successful outcome of their scheme—although that scheme will be held in abeyance for six hundred lines before the Tutor re-enters, and in the meantime less positive hints intrude, as noted below.

In his reply to the Tutor, Orestes rehearses their scheme to enter the house and advises his companion to say he has come from Phanoteus, ‘who happens to be a great ally’ of Clytaemestra and Aegisthus (ὁ γὰρ/μέγιστος αὐτοῖς τυγχάνει δορυξένων, 45–46). The uncommon noun δορύξενος, ‘spear-friend’, is used in the same context in *Choephoroi* when Orestes rehearses with the Chorus his scheme to enter the house; in Aeschylus, Orestes is trying to explain the presence of his companion Pylades, whom he calls ‘a friend and ally of the house’, ξένος δὲ καὶ δορύξενος δόμων (*Cho.* 562)—thus trumping Clytaemestra’s attempt in the previous play to reassure her husband about the absence of Orestes, who is with Strophius, ‘a friendly ally’, εὐμένης δορύξενος (*Agam.* 880). A word that combines the ideas of guest-friendship and force, implying both trust and armed protection, is thus repeatedly used—paradoxically—to advance treacherous schemes that rely not on the soldier’s spear but on the axe or sword. First Clytaemestra uses the allegiance of Strophius to deceive her husband, then Orestes uses the allegiance of Pylades to excuse his disguise as a foreigner bringing news of Orestes’ death, and finally Sophocles’ Orestes instructs the Tutor to name a new character, Phanoteus, whose surpassing allegiance to the usurpers (μέγιστος αὐτοῖς ... δορυξένων) is meant to disarm any suspicions they may have about the (false) news he brings from Phocis. The allusions thus suggest that Clytaemestra’s own treacherous methods are being used against her, and to this extent imply she will suffer just retribution; at the same time, however, the increasing complexity of these deceptions may leave the promised reciprocity in doubt.

Orestes then reminds the Tutor to retrieve an urn they have hidden in some bushes. He calls it ‘a beaten thing with sides of bronze’, τύπωμα χαλκόπλευρον (54), a riddling periphrasis that recalls the simpler expression he uses in *Choephoroi* to report the words of Strophius: ‘the sides of a bronze vessel’, λέβητος χαλκίου πλευρώματα, now hold Orestes’ ashes (*Cho.* 686–687). The dense wording in Sophocles not only serves as trigger for the allusion, but also signals the greater importance of the urn and its deceptive appearance in this version of the story. In Aeschylus, the passing mention of an urn, like the direct speech attributed to Strophius (*Cho.* 680–687), makes the false news more concrete and hence more plausible. In Sophocles, this

same urn becomes a stage property of immense importance and the news a brilliant messenger speech, while the plausible ploy turns into an elaborate deception that almost overwhelms Electra.

The prologue concludes with a double allusion to *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*. Orestes ends his speech by greeting the 'ancestral land and local gods', πατρῶα γῆ θεοί τ' ἐγγώριοι (67), and asking them to help him exact revenge; Agamemnon on his return likewise addressed 'Argos and the local gods', Ἄργος καὶ θεοὺς ἐγγωρίους (*Agam.* 810), who assisted his victory and homecoming. The prayer of Orestes corrects the haughty connotation of his father's words, who addresses the gods and then says that they share with him the responsibility for sacking Troy and returning home, τοὺς ἐμοὶ μεταιτίους/νόστου δικαίων θ' ὦν ἐπραξάμην πόλιν/Πριάμου (*Agam.* 811–813). Yet the echo also introduces a note of uncertainty to the Sophoclean prologue, since it may prompt us to wonder if Orestes' return will indeed prove less disastrous than his father's. As if to dispel such uncertainty, Orestes adds that he comes to restore justice to the house, 'impelled by the gods', πρὸς θεῶν ὠρμημένος (70), recalling the words of the Chorus in *Choephoroi*, that Orestes has come from Delphi 'impelled by the god's good will', θεόθεν εὖ φραδαῖσιν ὠρμημένος (*Cho.* 941). In Aeschylus, however, the Chorus speaks with authority, since Orestes has just escorted Clytaemestra inside, having already killed Aegisthus, whereas in Sophocles, Orestes' words convey more hope than conviction. The two allusions thus offer two models for Orestes' return, one disastrous and one successful, but do not help us to speculate about whether this play will follow either model.

In the prologue to *Electra*, as the scholiast points out, 'the poet briefly and artistically reveals everything to us' (ἅπαντα δὲ ἡμῖν φιλοτέχνως ἐν βραχεῖ δεδήλωκεν ὁ ποιητής),⁹ including the setting, Orestes' prior rescue and exile, the fact that they have just arrived, and the presence of Pylades. But it is not just the information shared in dialogue that allows the prologue to shape expectations; allusions to Aeschylus' earlier treatment of the story arouse expectations of a reunion that will quickly be frustrated, as well as of a new beginning that will at once be deferred. These allusions suggest the dicey complexity of the conspirators' plan; they also magnify the urn that is marginal in Aeschylus, while marginalizing the role of Apollo that is central in that same play. The allusions thus generate suspense at their scheme and uncertainty concerning the very shape of the drama.

⁹ Papageorgius (1888) 97.

2. *Antigone*

In the *parodos* of Sophocles' *Antigone*, the Chorus recalls the battle of Thebans against Argives which has just taken place, and whose aftershocks will set in motion events of the drama—Creon's edict against burying Polyneices, and the stubborn defiance of Antigone. These choral recollections thus help to set the scene, and in doing so they also create a connection, as Gerald Else has emphasized, between the plot of Sophocles' *Antigone* and that of Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*.¹⁰ The links in this connection are the many echoes of the earlier drama, especially of its *parodos* and first *stasimon*. In the first strophic pair, allusions recall the *parodos* of the *Seven* where the women of Thebes react in terror to the approach of the Argive army. The second strophe recalls instead the first *stasimon* of the *Seven* in which the Chorus, although chastened by Eteocles, grows ever more fearful for the city. Sophocles' *parodos* contains other allusions, especially to Homer and Pindar, as John Davidson has shown,¹¹ but the allusions to Aeschylus play a special role in framing the plot of *Antigone*.

The *parodos* begins by welcoming the sun and the deliverance that a new day brings (100–103), but quickly turns to reflect on the threat that has been averted, namely 'the man with white shield marching fully-armed from Argos' (τὸν ἑλεύκασπιν Ἀργόθεν/φῶτα βάντα πανσαγίῃ† 106–107). The attacker with his shield has been driven back by the brighter disc of the sun, yet this success is qualified by an echo of the *parodos* in Aeschylus where the Chorus trembles as 'the splendid white-shielded host rises up to attack the city', ὁ λεύκασπις ὄρνυται λαὸς εὐ-/πρεπῆς ἐπὶ πόλιν διώκων (*Sept.* 90–91). The Chorus in Sophocles continues by speaking of the enemy 'fleeing headlong,' φυγάδα πρόδρομον (108), which likewise recalls the wording in Aeschylus: 'this great host sweeps headlong on horseback', ῥεῖ πολλὸς ὄδε λεῶς πρόδρομος ἱππότας (*Sept.* 80). The successive echoes in *Antigone* of the *Seven*'s frantic *parodos* create a double movement, highlighting the relief and joy of this new day by recalling the terrors of yesterday, and at the same time compromising this very joy by pausing to relive that terror. The effect is comparable to that of the famous allusion to Pindar's ninth *Paeon*: the opening words of the *parodos*, ἀχτίς ἀελίου (100), repeat the first two words in Pindar, ἀχτίς ἀελίου, τί πολύσκοπ' ἐμήσαο, 'ray of the sun, far-seeing, what are you planning?' (*Paeon* 9.1). Yet whereas in *Antigone* the Chorus

¹⁰ Else (1976) 35–40.

¹¹ Davidson (1983).

celebrates this as ‘the most beautiful light to ever shine upon seven-gated Thebes’, τὸ κάλλιστον ἑπταπύλῳ φανέν Θήβᾳ τῶν προτέρων φάος (100–102), the occasion of the paean was an eclipse in which the sun *failed* to appear, an evil omen which Pindar tries to avert, and which indirectly undermines the start of Sophocles’ *parodos*.

The antistrophe (117–133) piles up further allusions to the *parodos* of the *Seven*. In *Antigone* the Chorus elaborates on the fearsome sight of the invading army ‘rearing over the dwellings’, στὰς δ’ ὑπὲρ μελάθρων (117), ‘with bloody spears in a circle’, φονώσασιν ... κύκλῳ λόγχαις (117–119), recalling the description in Aeschylus of an army that ‘bellows above the walls’, βοᾷ ὑπὲρ τειχέων (*Sept.* 89), and of Argives who ‘circle the city of Cadmus’, Ἀργεῖοι δὲ πόλισμα Κάδμου/κυκλοῦνται (*Sept.* 120–121). By this point, the sustained description of the Argive host and the many echoes of Aeschylus have taken us back in time from the new day of the song’s opening line to the mounting panic of the Thebans before the battle. Sophocles’ Chorus goes on to speak of the enemy’s jaws being filled with their blood (γένυσιν πλησθῆναι, 121–122), a phrase which may recall the slaughter threatened in Aeschylus by the bridles in the horses’ jaws (γενυῶν ἱππίων μινύρονται φόνον χαλινοί, *Sept.* 123–124). The Chorus then speaks of ‘the clatter of war’, πάταγος Ἄρεος (125) in a clear echo of Aeschylus, where ‘the clatter of many spears’ prompts it to address the god of war (πάταγος οὐχ ἑνὸς δορός./τί ῥέξεις ... Ἄρης; *Sept.* 103–105). Again we have a double movement, this time in varying forms. First, after describing the enemy rearing above and threatening the city (117–119), the Chorus adds ἔβα (120), ‘it went [away]’, belatedly reminding us that the danger has passed. Second, the Chorus continues by inviting us to contemplate the destruction of Thebes that never took place: the enemy went away *before* filling its jaws with blood or setting fire to the city’s towers, ἔβα πρὶν ποθ’ ... κτλ (120–123). Third, the clatter of Ares in Sophocles drove the Argives away, ‘so great was it poised above their backs’, τοῖος ἀμφὶ νῶτ’ ἐτάθη/πάταγος Ἄρεος (124–125), while in Aeschylus it provoked the Chorus’ fearful prayer; the change underscores the release from fear in *Antigone*. Indeed, the tone now shifts, and the Sophoclean Chorus proclaims that the Argives have been punished for their arrogance: seeing them ‘advancing in a mighty flood’, πολλῷ ῥέματι προσνισσόμενους (130), Zeus struck them with lightning. This again recalls the *parodos* of Aeschylus, where ‘this mighty host pours headlong on horseback’ against Thebes, ῥεῖ πολὺς ὄδε λεῶς πρόδρομος ἱππότας (*Sept.* 80), only that fearsome spectacle is now contained. With the advantage of hindsight and victory, the Sophoclean Chorus thus delivers a triumphant moral verdict against the force that was at one time—and still remains in vivid recollection—so terrifying.

In the second strophe (134–146), its relative distance from events allows the Chorus to speak more concretely of the fall of Capaneus (134) while continuing the double vision of deliverance and recently looming danger: ‘who then, in frenzied attack, bringing fire, breathed against us with blasts of hateful wind’, πυρφόρος ὃς τότε μαινομένα ξὺν ὀρμῇ/βακχεύων ἐπέπνει/ρίπαῖς ἐχθίστων ἀνέμων (135–137). Recollection of the threat to the city prompts the Chorus to draw this time upon the first *stasimon* of the *Seven*, in which the women of that play voice their ever-mounting fear. In Aeschylus, the Chorus imagines the city’s destruction as the enemy brings fire (πυρφορεῖ, *Sept.* 341), the whole city smokes (*Sept.* 341–342), and Ares ‘in frenzy breathes against the city’, μαινόμενος δ’ ἐπιπνέει (*Sept.* 343–344). Some details of this scene—the personified Ares (Ἄρης, *Sept.* 344) and the sense of chaos, one man dragging off or killing another (ἄλλος δ’ ἄλλον ἄγει, *Sept.* 340)—are also echoed in Sophocles, but not without another shift of tone: ‘That was otherwise, but harsh and mighty Ares the charioteer allotted different things to different men’, εἶχε δ’ ἄλλα τάδ’ · <ἄλλ’> ἄλλ’ ἐπ’ ἄλλοις ἐπενώμα στυφελίζων μέγας Ἄρης δεξιόσειρος (138–140). The language of confusion in war is thus transmuted into a gnomic statement about fortune, and the god who in Aeschylus subdues nations and defiles reverence (λαοδάμας μαιίνων εὐσέβειαν Ἄρης, *Sept.* 343–344) in Sophocles represents order and control.

In alluding to the choral lyrics of *Seven against Thebes*, the *parodos* of *Antigone* sets up what I have called a double movement, reliving in memory fears that the attackers would destroy the city, while also distancing present reflection from past experience. The prologue of *Antigone* creates a similar double movement at the narrative level: the opening of the play marks a new day and perhaps a new beginning after the tainted victory over the Argives, yet Antigone’s plan and her dispute with Ismene promise to repeat the fratricidal disaster of the war. This paradoxical situation is summed up in a final allusion. In the closing lines of the *parodos*, the members of the Chorus leave to attend dances celebrating victory (152–154) in words that echo Hesiod’s account of the Muses. In *Theogony*, he says that Memory bore the Muses ‘as forgetfulness of hardship and release from cares’, λησμοσύνην τε κακῶν ἄμπαυμά τε μερμηράων (*Theog.* 55), and in *Antigone* the Chorus concludes by praying for forgetfulness to follow the present wars, ἐκ μὲν δὴ πολέμων/τῶν νῦν θέσθε λησμοσύναν (150–151). The forgetting born from Memory is a temporary release, under the spell of song and dance, but the war itself can no more be forgotten than can Aeschylus’ commemoration of it in *Seven against Thebes*. Hence the dynamic allusions of the Chorus shift back and forth between release and repetition, forgetting and remembering.

3. *Oedipus at Colonus*

Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, like his *Antigone*, alludes to other tragedies in the Theban cycle—with two interesting twists. First of all, Sophocles alludes to earlier plays of his own, *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*, as well as to those of Aeschylus and Euripides; and second, his allusions look backward and forward in time. These multiple echoes, some more explicit than others, help to propel the plot of this drama in a surprising new direction.¹²

From the first line of the play, the audience is led to understand the plot as following some years after the events portrayed in *Oedipus Tyrannus*: the protagonist enters saying, 'Antigone, child of a blind old man, what place have we come to?' Τέκνον τυφλοῦ γέροντος Ἀντιγόνη, τίνας/χώρους ἀφίγμεθ' (1–2). Then in his prayer to the Eumenides he connects this play to the earlier one by identifying the events of both as foretold by Apollo, 'who told me, when he delivered all those evil oracles, that after a long time there would come a rest when I came to a final place and found there a seat of the holy gods', ὅς μοι, τὰ πόλλ' ἐκεῖν' ὅτ' ἐξέχρη κακά,/ταύτην ἔλεξε παῦλαν ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ,/ἐλθόντι χώραν τερμίαν, ὅπου θεῶν/σεμνῶν ἔδραν λάβοιμι (87–90). This connection to *Oedipus Tyrannus* is reinforced at several points, especially when Oedipus is challenged by the Chorus to recount his famous crimes (521–548) and by Creon to defend them (960–1000). Many years have intervened, but these have included little but futile wandering, allowing *Oedipus at Colonus* to present itself as a virtual sequel to the earlier play.

Oedipus at Colonus also glances sideways at events that unfold simultaneously in Thebes. The entrances of Ismene, Creon, and especially Polyneices, bring news of the conflict between Oedipus' two sons, and temporarily show onstage the tensions mounting at Thebes toward full-scale war. The plot of Sophocles' play thus runs parallel to the first halves of *Seven against Thebes* and *Phoenician Women*, both of which begin with preparations for war and an ominous sense of foreboding. In at least two places we have an allusion not just to events at Thebes, but more specifically to Aeschylus' version of them. Polyneices, in the course of his speech attempting to enlist his father's support, enumerates the seven champions on the Argive side (1311–1325) just as a messenger did in *Seven against Thebes*. He begins with Amphiaraus: 'such a man was spear-brandishing Amphiaraus, most powerful both at the

¹² For a different view, see Markantonatos (2002) 161–165 and (2007) 216–224, who takes the allusions as reversing the disastrous end of *Antigone*.

spear and the paths of birds', οἷος δορυσσοῦς Ἀμφιάρεως, τὰ πρῶτα μὲν/δόρει κρατύνων, πρῶτα δ' οἰωνῶν ὁδοῖς (1313–1314). In Aeschylus, the Chorus, as it fearfully waits to hear how enemy leaders have drawn lots, says at the end of a strophe, 'and seven superior leaders of the army, with spear-brandishing weapons stand forth against the seven towers after drawing lots', ἐπτα δ' ἀγῆγορες πρέποντες στρατοῦ/δορυσσοῖς σαγαῖς πύλαις ἐβδόμαις/προσίστανται πάλῳ λαχόντες (*Sept.* 125–127). The rare compound δορυσσοῦς in a similar context connects the desperate pleas of Polyneices with the despairing cries of the chorus-women in Aeschylus, even as it also marks Polyneices as a fish out of water, a man more at home in the ominous *Seven against Thebes* than in Sophocles' drama of redemption. At the end of *Oedipus at Colonus*, Antigone asks Theseus to send her to Thebes so she might try to avert the battle between her brothers: 'and send us to Ogygian Thebes', Θήβας δ' ἡμᾶς/τάς ὠγυγίους πέμψον (1769–1770), she says, using the epithet 'Ogygian' to indicate the city's age. This adjective is uncommon; it is most often used to indicate the primal age of earth (Aesch. fr. 273a. 7), fire (Empedocles fr. 84. 34), and water (Hes. *Th.* 806; likewise earth, sea, and sky in Simias fr. 24. 12). It is used to describe Thebes only here and in *Seven against Thebes*, as the Chorus anticipates the city's destruction: 'how sad to hurl the Ogygian city down to Hades like this', οἰκτρὸν γὰρ πόλιν ᾧδ' ὠγυγίαν/Αἶδα προῖάψαι (*Sept.* 321–322). At the end of Sophocles' play, the echo of Aeschylus emphasizes the difference between the uplifting events that have taken place in the sacred grove of Colonus and the dire peril of the city that awaits Antigone.

Euripides' *Phoenician Women* covers much the same ground as *Seven against Thebes*, so its plot likewise runs parallel to that of *Oedipus at Colonus*, and indeed several allusions draw attention to this relationship. The Polyneices episode in Sophocles is loosely patterned after the debate between Polyneices and Eteocles that constitutes one of the striking innovations in *Phoenician Women*. In both cases Polyneices speaks at length, trying to justify the attack against his own city; in both cases it is a female relative, Antigone in Sophocles and Jocasta in Euripides, who tries to mediate the dispute, and in both the attempt fails, with disastrous results—the curse of Oedipus that will lead to war and the fratricidal showdown, respectively. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Polyneices' first words at seeing his father after so many years are: 'Ah! What shall I do? Should I weep first for my own troubles, children, or seeing those of my aged father?' οἶμοι, τί δράσω; πότερα τάμαυτοῦ κακὰ/πρόσθεν δακρύσω, παῖδες, ἢ τὰ τοῦδ' ὀρών/πατρός γέροντος; (1254–1256). A similar deliberation accompanies a different entrance in *Phoenician Women*, where Creon re-enters with the body of his son Menoeceus,

lamenting: 'Ah! What shall I do? Should I weep and groan first for myself or for the city, which such a fog surrounds?' οἷμοι, τί δράσω; πότερ' ἑμαντοῦ ἢ πόλιν/στένω δακρύσας, ἦν πέριξ ἔχει νέφος/τοιοῦτον ...; (*Phoen.* 1310–1312). In Euripides, the scene with Polyneices and the words of lament are part of the escalation of disasters taking place in and around the city; the similar words in Sophocles, by contrast, are more narrowly bound to Polyneices and his mad ambitions—which will prove disastrous for the city but somehow cannot darken the world of Oedipus in Athens. At the end of Sophocles' play, Antigone and Ismene leave for Thebes on a desperate mission to prevent the brothers from killing one another (1770–1772), in effect replicating the desperate mission of Jocasta and Antigone to do exactly the same thing in Euripides (*Phoen.* 1277–1281). In the latter case, the women's failure is played out in the report of Jocasta's suicide over the bodies of her sons and in the spectacle of Antigone lamenting over all three; in Sophocles, however, all this lies in the future, and we are left with a stark contrast between the numinous powers in the grove of the Eumenides and the ongoing sorrows of Thebes, to which Antigone will soon return.

Oedipus at Colonus also looks forward in time to events portrayed in Sophocles' *Antigone*. These allusions to subsequent events are clustered in the second half of the play, with the first occurring near its midpoint. When Creon arrives, wanting Oedipus to return with him to Thebes, the argument between the two men might seem to echo their quarrel early in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, but when Creon takes Antigone hostage, the tone changes. Oedipus proceeds to call down a curse on Creon: 'May the all-seeing god, the Sun, give you yourself and your line a life and old age like mine!' τοιγάρ σέ καὶ τὸν καὶ γένος τὸ σὸν θεῶν/ὁ πάντα λεύσσω "Ἥλιος δοίη βίον/τοιοῦτον οἷον καὶ γηρᾶναι ποτε (868–870). Spectators know that the curse will come true at the end of *Antigone*, when Creon realizes that he is responsible for the deaths of his wife and his only son. Later, when Polyneices prepares to leave empty-handed, cursed by his father instead of gaining his support, he begs Antigone—if those curses come true—to bury him: 'do not leave me dishonoured, but place me in a tomb with offerings', μὴ μ' ἀτιμάσῃτε γε, ἀλλ' ἐν τάφοις θέσθε κἂν κτερίσασιν (1409–1410). The notion that he might be dishonoured by the denial of burial rites, and that his sister might have to take up that duty for him, explicitly anticipates the plot of *Antigone*, and may also allude to the language of Creon's decree forbidding burial: 'this city has proclaimed that no one may give him lamentations or offerings at a tomb', τοῦτον πόλει τῇδ' ἐκκεκήρυκται τάφῳ/μήτε κτερίζειν μήτε κωκυσαί τινα (*Ant.* 203–204). Finally, at the end of the play, Antigone tries to persuade Ismene to join her in returning to

their father's grave, and declares that she wants to die there (1724–1736). This recalls the prologue of *Antigone*, where Antigone wants to return to her brother's grave, even at the risk of death, although the measured dialogue of that prologue is replaced here with short bursts of lyric. Antigone is soon dissuaded, and the exchange adds little to the plot, but it does serve to remind us of the fatal imperatives that shall continue to motivate events in the city of Thebes, if not in Colonus.

Taken together, the allusions to all these works mark *Oedipus at Colonus* as veering away from the familiar story of Oedipus to present something quite new. Explicit allusions to *Oedipus Tyrannus* confirm that the play not only takes the familiar Theban cycle as its subject, but also continues the specific treatment of it by Sophocles himself in his earlier drama. The allusions to *Seven against Thebes* and *Phoenician Women* mark the distance, both physical and conceptual, between the action onstage in Athens and the existing treatments of this portion of the cycle in Thebes. Finally, allusions to *Antigone* reaffirm that distance by contrasting the mystical end of Oedipus with the continuing cycle of disasters to which his daughters will return. Overall, Sophocles' allusions dynamically and progressively direct the plot into uncharted waters.¹³

4. *Ajax*

Scattered through the first half of Sophocles' *Ajax* are echoes of the messenger speech in Aeschylus' *Persians*, describing to the Queen and her council the Persian defeat at Salamis. In this case, unlike our previous examples, there is no plot connection between the two plays, and this makes it harder to see how Sophocles might be using these echoes to direct the response of spectators.¹⁴ In what follows, I will show how these allusions are in fact significant and help to establish a relation between the plots.

In the prologue, as the goddess Athena tries to describe to Odysseus the madness of Ajax, she vividly recounts how he killed the cattle and sheep: 'he fell on them and was hewing slaughter of many beasts, splitting spines in a circle about him', ἐσπεσὼν ἔκειρε πολύκερων φόνον/ κύκλῳ ῥαχιζών

¹³ I argue elsewhere that the prologue of this play involves an analogous leap into unmarked theatrical space; see Dunn (1992).

¹⁴ Accordingly, Richard Garner asserts that the tangential relation between the dramas—in one, Ajax is a mythical protagonist, in the other, his name identifies a historical site—'preclude[s] any sort of allusion': Garner (1990) 50.

(55–56). The phrase added in enjambment conveys both the indiscriminate nature of Ajax' violence, with κύκλω, and its brute force, with the rare word ῥαχίζω. This word in this particular sense occurs elsewhere only in Aeschylus' *Persians*, where it gives a similar graphic force to the messenger's report of Greeks slaughtering Persians: 'with splinters of oars and shards of wreckage, they were striking them, were splitting their spines', ἀγῆσι κωπῶν θράυμασιν τ' ἐρειπίων/ἔπαιον, ἐρράχιζον (*Pers.* 425–426). Lest we miss the allusion in *Ajax*, it is repeated a little later when Tecmessa uses the same word in her own description of her husband's madness: 'some he beheaded, some he lifted and was cutting their throats and splitting their spines', τοὺς μὲν ἡυχένιζε, τοὺς δ' ἄνω τρέπων/ἔσφαζε κάρραχιζε (298–299). Tecmessa uses two imperfect tenses in enjambment, as did the Persian messenger, and for good measure she adds a new word modelled after that of Aeschylus: αὐχενίζω, from αὐχὴν, 'neck-ify' or 'behead', by analogy with ῥαχίζω, from ῥαχίς, 'spine-ify' or 'cut in two'. In echoing the language of the Persian messenger, Tecmessa also captures some of his tone, expressing both horror and sympathy at the spectacle, although her sympathy is more for her husband than the victims. The messenger's speech in *Persians* describes a profoundly important event in Athenian memory, and the speech itself is a remarkable performance, a 'messenger speech in its ... most ambitious form',¹⁵ becoming thus a monument to Athenian achievements at Salamis.¹⁶ For Sophocles' audience a generation later, the messenger's narrative in *Persians* both commemorated a glorious past and was a specimen of that past, and the two aspects are invoked in *Ajax*: Athena and Tecmessa cast Ajax's slaughter of the animals as a monumental deed, and at the same time place it at a distance—not merely offstage and unseen, but within a legendary world to which the spectators lack access.

Within the *kommós* lamenting his madness and shame, Ajax begins the final antistrophe and says farewell to the shores of the Troad: 'O sea-crashed pathways and seaside caves and blufftop grove', ἰὼ/ πόροι ἀλίρροθοι/πάραλά τ' ἄντρα καὶ νέμος ἐπάκτιον (412–413). The opening phrase πόροι ἀλίρροθοι, 'sea-crashed pathways', is unusual, perhaps suggesting in this context the escape that Ajax now believes is impossible. It is repeated from the messenger's speech in *Persians*, where it suggests instead the escape of Athenian ships that Xerxes wants to prevent: 'to guard outsailings and the sea-crashed pathways, and other ships in a circle around the island of Ajax', ἔκπλους

¹⁵ Rosenmeyer (1982) 198.

¹⁶ For a good discussion of the messenger speech, see Barrett (2002) 23–55.

φυλάσσειν καὶ πόρους ἀλιρρόθους, / ἄλλας δὲ κύκλῳ νῆσον Αἴαντος πέριξ (*Pers.* 367–368). The epithet ἀλιρρόθος is rare, occurring only in these two passages modifying πόροι, and in two later passages where it modifies ἀκτὴ (*Eur. Hipp.* 1205 and Moschus, *Europa* 132, where Moschus seems to copy Euripides just as Sophocles copies Aeschylus). Especially interesting is the messenger's description of Salamis in the following line as 'the island of Ajax', so that Ajax's apostrophe in Sophocles does not simply echo vocabulary but implies a connection between the living hero in one play and the place that commemorates him in the other.

In the following episode, Ajax bids his son goodbye, implying that he means to kill himself, and this leads the chorus-members to voice their fears in a *stasimon* that contrasts their happy home in Greece with their present despair. They begin by turning to address the island Salamis: 'O famous Salamis, maybe you live happily, beaten by the sea and ever conspicuous to everyone', ὦ κλεινὰ Σαλαμίς, σὺ μὲν που / ναίεις ἀλίπλακτος εὐδαίμων, / πᾶσιν περίφαντος αἰεὶ (596–598), where the rare epithet 'sea-beaten', ἀλίπλακτος (otherwise attested only in Pindar, *Pythian* 4.14), is modelled on the synonymous epithet θαλασσόπληκτος which occurs in the Persian messenger's speech and nowhere else. There, in naming the many captains killed by the Greeks, the messenger reports that a certain Tenagon 'now roams the sea-beaten island of Ajax', θαλασσόπληκτον νῆσον Αἴαντος πολεῖ (*Pers.* 307). As in our previous passage, the apostrophe in Sophocles borrows an unusual epithet from Aeschylus while also connecting the protagonist Ajax with the island closely associated with his memory.

The most striking and well-known reminiscence of Aeschylus' messenger speech occurs in the subsequent 'deception speech', where Ajax seems to imply that he relents, since all things change, season replaces season, and 'night's eternal circle well knows to kindle light for day on its white horses', ἐξίσταται δὲ νυκτὸς αἰανῆς κύκλος / τῇ λευκοπῶλῳ φέγγος ἡμέρᾳ φλέγειν (672–673). The highly compressed expression 'white-horsed day' for 'the approach of day, drawn by white horses (i.e. at dawn)' echoes the Persian messenger's description of the moment at which the Greek forces attacked, singing their eerie war-song: 'but when day on its white horses, bright to behold, filled all the earth ...', ἐπεὶ γε μέντοι λευκόπωλος ἡμέρα / πᾶσαν κατέσχε γαίαν εὐφειγγῆς ἰδεῖν ... (*Pers.* 386–387). In Aeschylus, the expression is an objective correlative to Persian awe at the Greeks' failure to retreat and their entirely unexpected attack. In Sophocles, the context for this sense of mystery is ambivalent: does Ajax invoke the powerful cosmic cycle of night and day to express his change of heart, or does he hint, as the Chorus suspects, at something dreadful about to happen?

In the next scene a messenger enters, heightening suspense by reporting Calchas' warning that Ajax be kept inside; otherwise Athena may punish him for his arrogant boast that he needs no help from the gods in battle: 'even without them I am sure I shall wield the glory you speak of', ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ δίχρα/κείνων πέποιθα τοῦτ' ἐπισπάσειν κλέος (768–769). There is perhaps an echo of the Queen in *Persians*, who explains to the messenger that Xerxes sought to punish the Athenians for the defeat at Marathon: 'expecting to exact requital for that, my son got such a multitude of miseries', ὦν ἀντίποινα παῖς ἐμὸς πράξεν δοκῶν/τοσόνδε πλῆθος πημάτων ἐπέσπασεν (*Pers.* 476–477). Both contexts involve hubristic error, and in both cases we have an otherwise unattested use of the active verb ἐπισπάω not as a word suggesting motion literally ('pull') or metaphorically ('induce'), but rather as a stronger equivalent of 'get' or 'acquire': Ajax is sure he will really get glory; Xerxes really got disaster instead of revenge. Fittingly, by this point in Sophocles' play, the spectators know that Ajax has already brought destruction on himself.

These allusions all look back to the messenger's speech in *Persians*, yet, as noted above, the lack of connection between the plots of *Ajax* and *Persians* requires special explanation. The verbal connections are strong: the coinage αὐχενίζω in 298 makes it clear that 56 and 299 both allude to *Persians* 426; the allusions at 412 and 597 both occur at the opening of a *stasimon* or lyric section 'where the audience will be particularly alert for anything out of the way which might suggest allusion',¹⁷ and that at 673 involves a highly distinctive figure of speech. There is at the same time what we might call a metonymic connection between the plots of the two plays, insofar as Ajax is prominently identified in *Persians* as the hero who gave his name to Salamis, 'the island of Ajax' (*Pers.* 307, 367, 596). His association with the Battle of Salamis is not confined to Aeschylus: before the battle, according to Herodotus, the Greeks 'prayed to all the gods, and called upon Ajax and Telamon' (8.64), and after their victory they dedicated captured triremes at Sounion, at the Isthmus, and to Ajax on Salamis (8.121).¹⁸ The Greeks believed that Ajax the hero took part in the battle and aided their victory, and we may therefore say that the connection between *Ajax* and *Persians* is sequential rather than metonymic insofar as both plays depict episodes

¹⁷ Garner (1990) 6.

¹⁸ It is noteworthy that in the former passage, Ajax and his father are named, but the gods are not, in the latter passage, Ajax is named as receiving a dedication but the others (presumably Athena and Poseidon) are not.

from Ajax's career, one starting just before death, the other much later. Sophocles, by choosing a Chorus of Salaminian sailors and by placing heavy emphasis on sailing and the island of Salamis 'in terms that clearly imply the glorious Athenian victory there in 480 BC',¹⁹ situates his own drama as a precursor to Aeschylus' *Persians*. He goes on to strengthen that connection with allusions to the great messenger speech about the battle. Jenny March has already shown the degree to which Sophocles rehabilitates the shameful death of Ajax,²⁰ and we can now add that through his allusions to Aeschylus' play the tragedian further redeems the hero by invoking his remarkable role at the battle of Salamis.

Although sophisticated uses of allusion are by no means restricted to Sophocles, I have not found parallels, in particular, to his dynamic appropriation of another play; in Aeschylus' case we simply do not have the work of prior dramatists for comparison, and in Euripides allusion often borders on parody, as noted at the beginning of this essay. Nevertheless, in his study of allusion in Greek tragedy Richard Garner states that, 'in its ominous and prophetic use of Aeschylus and the *Iliad*, *Iphigeneia at Aulis* shows us Euripides in his most serious and Sophoclean allusive mode';²¹ I therefore conclude by briefly noting some differences between Euripides' practice in this play and the dynamic technique of Sophocles.

Iphigeneia at Aulis makes frequent allusion to the *Oresteia* (especially *Agamemnon*), a trilogy that dramatizes subsequent events in the same mythic cycle, and in this respect it is comparable to *Oedipus at Colonus*, which in several places looks forward to the events of *Antigone*. Euripides' allusions may be described as 'progressive', since they shift from the sacrifice of Iphigeneia to the murderous aftermath of Agamemnon's return from Troy. As Garner notes,²² *Iphigeneia* repeatedly alludes (443, 511, 718, 913) to the Chorus' recollection of the sacrifice in the *parodos* of *Agamemnon*, with the result that the father's wavering in Euripides is coloured with a heavy sense of foreboding. Subsequent allusions in the latter part of the play (686, 977–980, 1106, 1146–1147) look forward to events of *Agamemnon* itself, specifically exchanges involving Agamemnon and Cassandra just before they are murdered (914, 784–789, 914, 1178–1183); we thus have a shift, from foreboding that the protagonist of Euripides' play will indeed be killed, to

¹⁹ Rose (1995) 70.

²⁰ March (1991–1993).

²¹ Garner (1990) 176.

²² Garner (1990) 174–175.

anticipation of disastrous consequences in the distant future. This is sophisticated use of allusion, but not 'dynamic' as I have defined it: we are not given hints of possible directions in which the plot may turn, but a deeper or more complex reaction to events as they unfold onstage. And that, as they say, is another story.

PART III

SOPHOCLES THE INNOVATOR: MUSIC, LANGUAGE, NARRATIVE

SOPHOCLES AND MUSIC

Timothy Power

1. *Introduction*

Despite the fact that its melodies are all but lost, it is important to remember (and, for the modern reader, all too easy to forget) that classical tragedy was to a great extent musical drama. Although it is occasionally compared to opera, tragedy finds a more accurate formal analogue in Broadway 'book musicals', with their characteristic alternation of song-and-dance numbers (the score) and spoken dialogue (the book). Whereas creative labour is typically divided in contemporary musical theatre, however, for most if not all of the fifth century BC, tragedians assumed sole control over story, text, music, and dance. Sophocles was thus as accomplished a musical composer as he was a poet and dramatist.

Tragedy played a key role in the dynamic culture of *mousikê* in classical Athens and Greece at large, exerting both a centripetal and a centrifugal force on other musical media.¹ It was a musically appropriative and recombinant form unlike any other, an amalgam of choral and monodic song traditions, both those accompanied by the twin reed pipes called *auloi*, as it itself generally was, as well as those performed to the lyre, and those celebratory (such as the paean or epinician) next to those sorrowful (the various species of lament which constituted the 'home key' of tragic music). Its amateur choruses and professional singer-actors were made to sing in a diverse range of stylistic idioms. And, as the fifth century BC wore on, tragedy absorbed a liberal dose of the melodic, harmonic, and performative novelties of the New Music, which Athenian audiences were experiencing also at the dithyrambic performances of the City Dionysia and at the musical contests of the Panathenaea, where virtuoso musicians were radically challenging musical conventions. At the same time, tragedy itself was enormously influential on the very musical media from which it borrowed; tragedians were not so much followers in the New Music movement as they were its leaders.²

¹ Herington (1985); cf. Battezzato (2005); Swift (2010).

² On this last point, see Csapo (1999/2000); Wilson (2009a).

Music is also a major preoccupation of tragic *poetry*. That is, tragedy engages music as a cultural discourse, a fund of programmatically meaningful images, metaphors, myths, and concepts. The tragedian could even take legendary musicians such as Orpheus or Thamyras as his subject. And just as contemporary religious and political concerns could be refracted in the mythical world of tragedy, so there is reason to believe that tragedy dealing with musical themes could comment, by mythical proxy, on developments in the musical scene of which it was a part. We associate contemporary reflection on fifth-century musical culture above all with the poets of Old Comedy. But we might do well to view tragedians too as self-conscious makers-cum-critics of Athenian music, embedding timely reflections on music within their 'timeless' dramatic plots.³

The critical focus of classical comedy on the aesthetic and ethical value of music in contemporary tragedy is a clear indication of music's original importance. The most famous example of such criticism is the contest staged between Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, in which as many lines are devoted to parodies of the *melopoeia*, 'songmaking', of the two tragedians (1249–1363) as to the other aspects of their craft. Aristotle's *Poetics*, however, represents a significant departure from earlier evaluative criteria. Although we should not underestimate Aristotle's appreciation of music's affective and hedonic power,⁴ there is no question that music receives short shrift in the *Poetics* as we have it. Aristotle casts *melopoeia* (along with *opsis*, 'spectacle') in a supporting role to plot, character, meaning, and diction. Inasmuch as it effectively communicates these formalist elements, the tragic text *qua* literary artefact can, and indeed should, transcend the visual and aural conditions of theatrical performance (cf. *Poetics* 1453b7, 1462a12). Aristotle's privileging of 'book' over 'score' inaugurated a long-lasting marginalization of music in the study of tragedy, a neglect deepened by the scanty preservation of notated music accompanying tragic texts.⁵

The music of the tragedians has by no means gone completely unstudied in classical scholarship. But it is only in recent years, as part of a general renewal of interest in the practical and symbolic importance of *mousikê* in ancient Greek culture, that scholars have begun to reckon in a sophisticated

³ Cf. Wilson (1999/2000), (2009a).

⁴ Cf. Sifakis (2001) 53–71.

⁵ West (1999) discusses Hellenistic papyrus scraps containing notated verses attributed to Sophocles, probably the fifth-century tragedian's grandson.

fashion with the complex status of music in tragic drama.⁶ Much of this work has been devoted to Euripides, whose plays are rife with musical discourse and whose musical persona—a controversial yet popular innovator—is well attested by the ancient sources. Sophocles *mousikos* remains a far more elusive figure. In the vast scholarship on Sophoclean tragedy, there has indeed been remarkably little penetrating discussion about its musical content. For one, the canonical white marble in which Sophocles has long been cast has arguably acted as a barrier to an appreciation of it. As early as *Frogs*, he is already a classic, aloof from the polemics surrounding Aeschylus and Euripides. In Aristotle's *Poetics* he is the consummate dramatic poet, whose sublime handling of character and plot is apparent even to a reader (1453b7). And while not all Sophoclean scholars would fully endorse T.B.L. Webster's baseless assertion that Sophocles composed 'sober music' (unlike Euripides and Agathon), there has clearly been a general reticence to view him as an *au courant* participant in the musical scene of his time.⁷

There are other, less ideological barriers, however. First, there were in fact fewer sung verses in the preserved Sophoclean tragedies than in those of Aeschylus, whose expansive choral songs reflect the 'melocentric' origins of tragedy, and those of Euripides, with their aria-like monodies. Significantly, Aristotle's ideal tragedy, the *OT*, has the fewest sung verses in the Sophoclean corpus, just under 20% of the total lines. Furthermore, there are fewer textual references to music here than in Aeschylean and Euripidean tragedies, which abound in musical imagery.⁸

But this is not to say that preserved Sophoclean tragedy is devoid of such imagery; we will examine a few examples below.⁹ And if we look at the fragments, we glimpse an eccentric range of musical language. We may wager too that, had we more substantial fragments of the lost works, the overall proportion of song to speech in Sophocles would come into line with that in his rivals. Indeed, a text-based method of quantifying musicality by counting melic lines might misrepresent ancient perceptions. Aristophanic criticism of Euripides suggests that his characters were as recognizable for their talkativeness as their singing. In *Peace* Trygaeus includes among the delights associated with the City Dionysia '*auloi*, tragic performers,

⁶ See bibliography compiled in Csapo (1999/2000) and Wilson (2005) 192–193.

⁷ Webster (1936) 126. Scott (1996a) is more concerned with Sophoclean metre than music. Wilson (2009a) is an important reassessment of Sophocles *mousikos*; cf. also Pinacuda (1978) 127–129.

⁸ Cf. Scott (1996a) 11–12. Aeschylus: Haldane (1965); Euripides: Csapo (1999/2000).

⁹ Cf. Haldane (1965) 40–41.

the tunes (*melê*) of Sophocles, thrushes, and Euripides' poetic versicles (*epyllia*). Sophocles the songmaker is contrasted with Euripides the 'poet of courtroom speeches', as Hermes later phrases it (531–534; cf. *Ran.* 1069–1073).

Comedy does not, however, give us a very clear sense of the character of Sophoclean music. What little we have is favourable yet vague. Aristophanes refers to Sophocles as having been anointed with honey (fr. 581; cf. 580a). The image alludes to the sweetness of his songs, which earned Sophocles the nickname 'Honeybee'. Yet 'sweetness' is fairly generic praise, especially for a tragedian, which might lead us to suspect that his music was as inoffensively pleasant as his personality was reputed to be (cf. *Ran.* 82). Indeed, a scholiast to *Ajax* 1199 says, 'Sophocles, being the sweetest, inclined to his own character in his *melê*, and was thus called "Honeybee"'.¹⁰

The absence of Sophocles from *Frogs* leaves us with the specious impression that he occupied a 'sober' musical middle ground between Aeschylus' archaic solemnity and Euripides' populist modernism. Similarly misleading is Aristophanes' attempt in *Frogs* to align Sophocles with Aeschylus (786–790, 1515–1519), and so to a conservative aesthetic (an argument perpetuated by Webster and others).

In a revealing passage perhaps dependent on Ion of Chios,¹¹ *Life of Sophocles* 20 offers a variant explanation of the 'Honeybee' nickname which, accurate or not, more convincingly captures the eclecticism of Sophocles' compositional process:

Many others have imitated one of their predecessors or contemporaries, but Sophocles alone plucked what was brilliant from each, and on account of this he was called 'Honeybee'. He introduced a mixture of elements: good timing, sweetness, boldness, and complexity.

Stylistic boldness (τόλμα) and complexity (ποικιλία) enliven Sophocles' vaunted sweetness (cf. *Plut. Mor.* 79b). While ποικιλία refers here to a general principle of diversity in dramatic composition, it also carries distinct associations with respect to music. By the later fifth century BC, it had become a catchword of the musical avant-garde, and was condemned as such by the musically reactionary Plato (*Resp.* 399e, *Leg.* 812d–e).

Sophocles was in fact recognized in antiquity as one who 'made many innovations (πολλὰ ἐκαινούργησε) in the dramatic contests' (*Life* 4). While not all the inventions ascribed to him can be genuine, there can be little

¹⁰ Cf. schol. Ar. *Pax* 531.

¹¹ Cf. Pelling (2007) 206.

doubt that he was open to novelty, in music as well as dramaturgy. It is unlikely that he was ever as radically experimental as Euripides or Agathon, the main targets of comedy's conservative critique. As far as we can tell, he pursued neither the freeform monodies of the former nor the show-stopping entr'actes of the latter (*embolima*, *Poetics* 1456a29).¹² But classic status, the accidents of preservation, and apparent exemption from comic parody should not deter us from appreciating Sophocles as a poet-composer of his time, both responding to and initiating musico-performative trends, including those of the New Music, whose rise coincided with much of his career.

2. *A Musician in the Making*

Sophocles is the only tragedian whose biographical tradition includes testimony about his early musical formation:

He worked hard among the boys both in the palaestra and in the study of *mousikê*; as Ister claims [*FGHist* 334 fr. 35], he received victory crowns in both. He was taught music by Lamprus, and after the naval battle at Salamis, while the Athenians were at the victory monument, he, naked and anointed with oil, led off with his lyre the victory songs for those performing the paean.
(*Life of Sophocles* 3)

This portrait of an adolescent overachiever seems authentic enough. As the son of a wealthy father in early fifth-century Athens (*Life* 1), Sophocles no doubt enjoyed access to an exclusive musical education, which would primarily have involved lessons on the lyre. Basic skill on this instrument would remain for much of the fifth century BC a mark of the *kalos k'agathos*, who was expected to perform lyric tunes at symposia throughout his adult life.

But elite musical training in Sophocles' youth was not restricted to the amateur lyre; it was more ambitious. Indeed, Sophocles came of age during a free-for-all of cultural experimentation in Athens that had *mousikê* as

¹² Actors' song is never entirely detached from the chorus in Sophocles, but he nevertheless 'accommodated the new professionalism in music' by increasing the amount of solo *melos* in his late plays (Csapo 1999/2000, 412). Furthermore, he took liberties in his quasi-monodies which Euripides did not: his heroic protagonists, both female and male, sing laments (Hall 1999, 112; 2002, 9–10). For Wilson (2009a) 60–61, the story that Sophocles stopped acting because of his weak voice (*Life* 4) may derive from his portrayal of voice-deprived Thamyras, but it might rather reflect his commitment to employing virtuoso singer-actors.

a central focus. Our source for this is Aristotle, who says that around the time of the Persian Wars, the Athenians, flush with wealth and eager to display their excellence (*aretê*) ‘pursued every kind of learning, experimenting without discrimination’. This fervour included *aulos* playing, which at least one Athenian aristocrat himself displayed at the dramatic contests. Interest was cultivated in the Asiatic stringed instruments originally at home in chic Eastern Greek sympotic circles, the *barbitos* and the harp.¹³ Sophocles’ musical education surely included exposure to the *auloi* and these other instruments.¹⁴ Further, Ister’s claim that Sophocles won crowns for music is probably reliable. These would have been for victories in schoolroom *agônes*, but he may have participated too in public festival contests for boys, such as those at the Panathenaea in *kithara* playing and singing to *auloi*.¹⁵ If the Athenian aristocracy of the later classical period was largely conservative and amateur in its attitudes to *mousikê*, that of the early fifth century BC was anything but. We may suppose that his *paideia* instilled in Sophocles not a static ‘traditional’ sensibility but rather a receptiveness to new musical possibilities.

If it is historical—and there is no compelling reason to believe it is not—then Sophocles’ tutelage under Lamprus reflects both his family’s wealth and his own professional aspirations. The few testimonia about Lamprus indicate that he was a poet-composer and teacher well-known in his own day and long afterward. At Ps.-Plut. *On Music* 31.1142b, a passage drawn from the fourth-century BC musicologist Aristoxenus of Tarentum, he is mentioned alongside Pindar and other choral poets as a ‘highly reputable’ composer of the ‘best sort of music’ (*kallistê mousikê*), and as such a model for traditionally-minded musicians. For Aristoxenus, Lamprus was a classic of the old-fashioned music he so romanticized.

Yet we should beware of the distortions that may result from such a nostalgic view. In a comedy of Phrynichus, a *mousikos* named Lamprus—almost certainly the one identified as Sophocles’ teacher—comes in for the kind of invective usually aimed at members of the musical avant-garde:

¹³ *Politics* 8.1341a28–42. Cf. Wilson (1999) 94.

¹⁴ The schoolroom scenes on a drinking cup by Douris of ca. 490–480 BC (Berlin F 2285) well illustrate the eclectic environment in which Sophocles studied music. See Bundrick (2005) 2, fig. 1.

¹⁵ If in fact the adult Sophocles played the *kithara* as he performed the title role in his *Thamyras* (*Life* 5), he would perhaps have been drawing upon his own formative experience in competitive lyre music. Boys’ contests at the Panathenaea: *IG* II² 2311, with Power (2010) 53.

'A water-drinking man, a humming hypersophist, skeleton of the Muses, a fever to nightingales, a hymn of Hades' (fr. 78 K-A). Rather than the anodyne classic evoked by Aristoxenus, Lamprus appears through the lens of comic abuse as a more realistic representative of contentious fifth-century musical culture. His characterization as a 'skeleton of the Muses' recalls one of the most vilified exponents of the New Music, Cinesias, whose gaunt appearance, no doubt believed to reflect the insubstantiality of his dithyrambs, was a running joke.¹⁶ Similarly, Lamprus' water drinking might have been thought to reflect certain faddish, unnatural tendencies in his music. 'Humming hypersophist' likely refers both to the high fees he charged for lessons and to certain progressive ideas he held about musical education, and perhaps politics as well. We may compare the claim made in Plato's *Protagoras* that innovative musicians and pedagogues of the earlier fifth century BC such as Agathocles and the aulete Pythocles of Ceos used music as a deceptive screen for politically suspect sophistic teachings (316e–317a).¹⁷

In one of his plays Sophocles has a character speak of a citharode as 'my sophist' (fr. adesp. 906). Welcker assigned the fragment to the *Thamyras* (cf. *TrGF* IV, 578). The pseudo-Euripidean *Rhesus* calls Thamyras 'that Thracian sophist' (924), which might be an allusion to Sophocles' play. But Wilson makes the attractive suggestion that 'my sophist' in the *Thamyras* is actually Philammon, the hero's father. He observes, '[T]he description ... with a hint of anachronism, associates him with the various 'new thinkers' of the period, among whom were musical theorists and practitioners'.¹⁸ Lamprus may well have been counted among these 'new thinkers', and it may not be out of the question that Sophocles, playing the part of Thamyras, intended an allusion to his own 'sophist'.

We do not know in what comedy Phrynichus mentioned Lamprus. But the *Muses* of 405 is a strong candidate. Sophocles, recently deceased, was lauded in the play (fr. 31 K-A), which might have involved a contest between Sophocles and Euripides.¹⁹ Could the comic Euripides or one of his supporters have taken aim at Sophocles' own 'deviant' musical proclivities by recalling those of his music teacher? Another candidate: Phrynichus' *Konnos*, whose title character was presumably Socrates' lyre teacher. In *Menexenus*

¹⁶ Cf. Webster (1936) 177.

¹⁷ On these figures, see Wallace (2003).

¹⁸ Wilson (2009a) 78.

¹⁹ See discussion in Demand (1970) 83–84; but cf. objections in Harvey (2000).

236a, Socrates judges Lamprus' instruction 'inferior' to Konnos'. This might reflect some actual antagonism between the two music teachers that was played out in Phrynichus' comedy. Plato was inimical to novelty in *mousikê*, so Socrates' disapproval of Lamprus could indicate that Konnos played the traditionalist to Lamprus' more 'sophistic', innovative style.

Lamprus remains enigmatic, but it is clear that assumptions such as Webster's, that his musical style 'was sober and restrained', are contradicted by our limited testimony, and only obscure our understanding of Sophocles' own musicality.²⁰

Finally, there is the testimony concerning the paeanic performance to commemorate the Athenian-led victory at Salamis.²¹ The story could well be true. If so, it brilliantly exemplifies the socially and culturally complex formation of Sophocles' musical identity. We glimpse the mature poet of demotic, *auloi*-accompanied Dionysian tragedy in his pre-tragic chrysalis, as it were, as an ephebic, Apolline lyre-player, serving as lead-off singer (*exarchôn*) of the paeon, a deeply traditional genre that, we will see, was to be the subject of darkly ironic subversions in the drama of the adult Sophocles. The choral *exarchôn* was among the most iconic figures in Hellenic song culture; Archilochus describes himself 'leading off' both the dithyramb and the paeon (fr. 120, 121 West). Furthermore, the *exarchôn* played a leading part in the development of tragedy; according to Aristotle, the *exarchôn* of the dithyrambic Chorus evolved into the first actor-singer (*Poetics* 1449a10–11). Sophocles' leadership of an Apollonian rather than Dionysian Chorus is a notable twist, but in a sense anticipates the generic mutability of tragic *mousikê* itself.

It is significant too that the performance of paeans was relatively rare in classical Athens. Those Athenians who did cultivate the genre tended to be members of high-status clans, who sang and danced for Apollo on theoric missions to cult sites outside of the *polis*, above all Delos and Delphi.²² Indeed, the aristocratic tone of the paeanic commemoration of this most 'democratic' naval victory is remarkable; Sophocles' gleaming nudity is an especially high-status touch. The graceful marriage of aristocratic musical

²⁰ Webster (1936) 1–2.

²¹ Ath. 1.20e also records the story. Timotheus' *Persians* 196–201 describes a post-Salamis paeon, but does not mention Sophocles; cf. Power (2010) 545. Neither the *Life* nor Athenaeus indicate who composed the paeanic victory song or songs (the *Life* has the plural *epinikia*). Was Sophocles the composer? Simonides, whose *Sea-battle at Salamis* (PMG 536) may have been a paeon (Rutherford 1990, 200–201), is another candidate.

²² See Rutherford (2001) 32–33; Wilson (2004) 278.

glamour to democratic civic occasion reflects at once Sophocles' elite background and his popularity in the state theatre.²³

Of course, the anecdote may be fiction, perhaps an attempt to foreshadow in Sophocles' youth the poet-cum-general he would later become (cf. *Life* 9–10). Alternately, it could have arisen in connection to the tradition that Sophocles composed a paean for Asclepius.²⁴ Some more complicated cultural politics may lie behind its creation, however, perhaps involving the supposed rivalry between Sophocles and Aeschylus (*Life of Aeschylus* 8), whose *Persians* was the definitive musico-poetic 'adornment' of Salamis (Ar. *Ran.* 1027).

3. *New Sounds: Tragedy, Dithyramb, and the Aulos*

If Sophocles did lead the chorus after Salamis, his lyre would probably have been tuned in the Dorian *harmonia*, the mode whose upright character made it a match for the Apollonian paean.²⁵ We read in Ps-Plut. *On Music* that early tragedy combined the 'magnificent and dignified' Dorian mode with the Mixolydian, whose emotional character was especially suited to lament (16.1136d, probably from Aristoxenus; cf. Psell. *Trag.* 5.39).²⁶ The two-toned harmonic palette ascribed to early tragedy may be no more than a reductive construct of Aristoxenean musicology: the likes of Phrynichus and Aeschylus needed only these modes to express alternately the solemn reserve and emotional release that were essential to tragedy. Yet the tragic music that Sophocles inherited likely was quite simple. There are reports that he complicated it with the introduction of new modes. While we may view their specifics with scepticism, we should nonetheless consider how these reports might reflect Sophocles' broader musical tendencies.

According to *Life* 23, Aristoxenus claimed that Sophocles 'first of the poets from Athens took Phrygian *melopoeia* for his own songs and mixed in the dithyrambic style of music'. Aristoxenus must mean not that Sophocles was

²³ For the class-transcending effect of Sophocles' *charis* 'grace'—a term with musico-poetic, as well as personal implications—see *Life* 7.

²⁴ *PMG* 737(b). Authorship is disputed: Connolly (1998) 2–4; de Martino (2003) 459–464. Beschi (1967/1968) 422–428 argues that Sophocles was portrayed with a lyre on a relief monument from the Asclepieion. His depiction with *kithara* in the Stoa Poikile (*Life* 5) could also have informed the anecdote.

²⁵ West (1992) 179–180; Rutherford (2001) 80.

²⁶ Early tragedy also made occasional use of the Ionian and relaxed Lydian modes (Aristoxenus fr. 82 Wehrli).

the first poet in Athens to use the Phrygian mode, but that, as the second part of the testimony suggests, he was the first tragedian to borrow the Phrygian from the composers of dithyramb, the genre most closely associated with it.²⁷ It is possible, of course, that Aristoxenus's testimony is accurate. But I suspect what lies behind the claim may be the recognition of Sophocles' more comprehensive engagement with new musical trends that were associated with the dithyramb and, in particular, its accompanying instrument, the *aulos*. The corollary claim, that he adopted a 'dithyrambic style of music (*tropos*)', supports this notion. Somewhat predictably, scholars have generally neglected the implications of this testimony; it is rather Euripides and Agathon who have been assigned the introduction of a dithyrambic style to tragedy, by which is meant the 'decadent' tendencies associated with composers of New Dithyramb such as Cinesias and Timotheus.²⁸

But as recent studies have demonstrated, Athens experienced a 'revolution' in *aulos* music in the earlier fifth century BC that served as prelude to the developments of the New Music.²⁹ Dithyramb was the primary site of the revolution; composers rethinking the theory and practice of *aulos* music composed for the dithyrambic circular choruses, including Lamprocles the Athenian, Melanippides of Melos, and, earlier, Lasus of Hermione, who 'changed the music that existed before him' by exploiting the 'many-notedness (*polyphônia*) of *auloi*' in his dithyramps (Ps.-Plut. *De mus.* 29.1141c). Although often grouped with the younger generation of New Dithyrambic composers he influenced, Melanippides was a close contemporary of Sophocles.³⁰ He is credited with promoting a still greater role for the instrumental virtuosity of the aulete in his dithyramps than Lasus

²⁷ West (1992) 180–181.

²⁸ See above all Kranz (1933) 313, with discussion in Sansone (2009) and Csapo (1999/2000) 413, who argues that Euripides inspired dithyrambists more than they inspired him. Even in antiquity, the idea that Sophocles was an early proponent of dithyramb seems to have provoked unease. The Byzantine treatise *On Tragedy*, which draws upon later Classical and Hellenistic sources, claims that Sophocles was first to take up the Phrygian and that 'old tragedy used it rather dithyrambically'. But we are then told that other modes 'suited to dithyramb'—presumably the corrupt New Dithyramb—were used only sparingly, and that it was Agathon who 'first introduced' them (5). For the ancient belief that New Dithyramb was the 'demise of *mousikê*', see Franklin (2013).

²⁹ Wallace (2003); Franklin (2013). As both scholars show, the first *aulos* revolution was distinct from the New Music inasmuch as the Athenian élite enthusiastically embraced it.

³⁰ Barker (1984) 93 dates Melanippides' activity to ca. 480–430; West (1992) 357 opts for a later dating, ca. 440–415.

had (Arist. *Rh.* 3.9.1409b; Ps.-Plut. *De mus.* 30.1141d). As we saw above, Lamprus was apparently a member of the early Athenian musical intelligentsia; a choral composer, he may have been a member of this first dithyrambic avant-garde as well.

Sophocles would have been familiar with the musical changes afoot in dithyramb. It is easy to imagine that he would have sought to adapt them to his similarly aulodic tragic *melê*. Many of the same auletes who accompanied dithyramps would have accompanied tragedies, thus allowing for easy traffic of musical techniques between the two media. A trace of the interaction between dithyramb and tragedy in the pre-New Music era may be present in Ps.-Plut. *On Music* 16.1136d, which preserves varying accounts of the 'invention' of the Mixolydian mode. In one account, contrary to Aristoxenus' view that Sappho invented the mode (fr. 81 Wehrli), the aulete Pythoclides, Pericles' music teacher, invented it, and Lamprocles, an Athenian dithyrambic poet and aulete (Ath. 491c), used his theoretical sophistication to analyze its harmonic properties anew and so revise its structure.³¹ It is virtually impossible that Pythoclides literally 'invented' the Mixolydian, but, whatever the truth of this account, its implication of dithyrambic musicians in the experimental manipulation of the mode traditionally associated with tragedy is significant, suggesting both that they were appropriating and elaborating tragic music—as Sophocles was borrowing the Phrygian mode and the dithyrambic style—and influencing it in turn.

Trachiniae, perhaps produced as early as the 450s,³² shows signs of Sophocles' interest in dithyramb and the cult of the virtuoso *aulos* it nourished. At line 205, the Chorus, joyfully anticipating the homecoming of Heracles, breaks into what is perhaps the strangest choral ode in the Sophoclean corpus, an excited, astrophic medley of choral genres: it begins with elements suggestive of the *hymenaios* and epinician (205–207), transforms into a paean (207–215), then shifts into a dithyramb (216–220); finally paean and dithyramb merge (221–224). Although brief, this song-and-dance intermezzo, built from fast-changing iambic metres, must have posed a challenge to the amateur Chorus. Astrophic *melê*, common in the monodies of Euripides, were generally the province of the professional singer (cf. Ps.-Arist. *Pr.* 19.15). We may surmise too that the musical score contained harmonic modulations (perhaps from Dorian to Phrygian) that underlined the

³¹ See Barker (1994) 221n113. It has been argued that Lamprocles is Lamprus; Wallace (2003) 74n6 is sceptical.

³² Easterling (1982) 19–23.

generic shifts of the text. In its rhythmic and (possible) modal freedom, as well as its vertiginous generic pastiche—a development singled out by Plato as a root cause of modern musical corruption (*Leg.* 700d)—the ode startlingly anticipates the New Music of the late fifth century BC.³³

Yet Sophocles may have composed this song in response to novelties he and his audience were hearing in mid-century dithyrambic culture. Melanippides in particular was known for breaking down the antistrophic structure of the dithyramb (Arist. *Rh.* 3.9.1409b), an innovation that was part and parcel of the professional aulete's increased prominence in dithyrambic performance. Generic conflation was likely already occurring in dithyrambs before the full onset of the New Music as well.³⁴ I would argue that in the dithyrambic section of the ode (216–220), Sophocles does not simply evoke dithyramb in an idealized, generic sense, but in culturally specific manifestations, archaic and contemporary. More precisely, he exploits to the fullest the mimetic versatility of the tragic chorus, casting it simultaneously in dithyrambic roles both regressive and progressive. The represented collective of Trachinian women becomes a primal troupe of maenads possessed by Dionysus; the representing Chorus of Athenian citizens becomes a musically sophisticated dithyrambic Chorus of the present day:³⁵

αείρομαι οὐδ' ἀπώσομαι
τὸν αὐλόν, ὦ τύραννε τὰς ἐμὰς φρενός.
ἰδοὺ μ' ἀναταράσσει,
εὐοῖ,
ὁ κισσὸς ἄρτι βακχίαν
ὑποστρέφων ἄμιλλαν. ἰὼ ἰὼ Παιάν.

I rise up, nor shall I reject the *aulos*, o tyrant of my senses. See, it stirs me up—
Euoi!—the ivy whirling me around in the Bacchic dance-contest (ἄμιλλα). Io,
io Paean!

It has been argued that the participle ὑποστρέφων 'whirling' is an oblique performative self-reference, describing the cyclic form the (normally rectangular) dramatic chorus assumes as it sings these lines.³⁶ That is, the

³³ On the generic conflation of dithyramb and paean, see Rutherford (1994/1995) 120. Cf. Battezzato (2005) 163, who makes the valid point that Plato dated music's decline to the end of the Persian Wars (cf. *Leg.* 699d); for him, Sophocles was very much 'New Music'.

³⁴ See Boardman (1956) on the possible mixture of citharodic music with that of the *aulos* in Melanippides' dithyramb *Marsyas*. Cf. Power (2013).

³⁵ On the play of choral identities in this song, see Henrichs (1994/1995) 53 ff. An archaizing Dionysianism was a fashion of the New Dithyramb; see Zimmermann (1992) 129–136, with Csapo (1999/2000). But evocations of 'primitive' Bacchic *choreia* were apparently a feature of early classical dithyramb as well (Pindar fr. 70b, 70c.7, 75.8–12 S-M).

³⁶ Burton (1980) 52.

distinctive circular chorus of the Athenian dithyrambic contests (cf. ἄμιλλα) suddenly takes shape in the tragic orchestra. The astrophic ‘modern’ music of the ode complements this anachronistic transformation. Another performative term, ἀείρομαι ‘I rise up’ (as if to take flight), may also serve to signal the ‘modernity’ of this tragic-dithyrambic chorus. Imagery of poets or performers going aloft was common in the self-descriptive and critical discourse surrounding the ‘airy’ New Dithyramb of the later fifth century BC.³⁷ Its elaborate appearance already by 423, however, in Aristophanes’ *Clouds* 333–338 (‘the song-benders of the circular choruses, airborne quacks ...’) suggests that the ‘aerial’ conceit may have been attached to dithyrambic culture at an even earlier point.

The aulete of *Trachiniae* also undergoes a transformation, into a dithyrambic accompanist, and probably a virtuoso one at that. This is indicated by the textual emphasis on the charismatic force of the *aulos*. On the one hand, at the level of the maenadic performance, the *aulos* assumes the irresistible persona of Dionysus; like the god, its uncannily overmasters its listeners. On the other hand, the praise of the *aulos* speaks to its dominant role in the contemporary performance of the civic dithyramb, which Sophocles likely recreated through a bravura ‘dithyrambic’ part for the tragic aulete.³⁸ It is notable that in the conservative reaction to changes in dithyramb, which likely began around the middle of the fifth century BC, the growing importance of the aulete was conceptualized in terms of an improper power differential between aulete—typically a low-status foreigner—and citizen chorus, and between ‘irrational’ *melos* and the disciplined *logos* of song.³⁹ We may see a reflection of this rhetoric in *Trachiniae*. Certainly, the qualification of the *aulos* as a *tyrannos*—the word recalls the Asiatic provenance

³⁷ Cf. Ar. *Vesp.* 333–338, *Pax* 827–831, *Av.* 1383–1385, 1387–1390, 1392–1394, with comments in Dunbar (1995) 665 and Csapo (1999/2000) 441. Already in the archaic period ἀείρεσθαι may have belonged to the poetics of choral dance; cf. Henrichs (1996) 29, with reference to Alcman 1.60–63; Ferrari (2008). If so, the layered semantics of the verb would accommodate the temporally dual identity of the Chorus.

³⁸ The astrophic nature of the ode would presumably have allowed the aulete to perform solo cadenzas between verses (cf. Psell. *Trag.* 9 for instrumental passages played between the stanzas of choral stasima). Melanippides introduced *anabolai*, long auletic ‘preludes’ that punctuated the sung text of the dithyramb (Arist. *Rh.* 3.9.1409b). Could the aulete also have assumed a more visible, interactive role during the ode, perhaps standing in the middle of the circular chorus, as he would at the dithyrambic contests? Cf. Wilson (2002) 60–61.

³⁹ Cf. Wilson (1999); Wallace (2003). The rant against the *thorubos* ‘noise’ and *hybris* of the virtuoso *aulos* in the melic fragment of Pratinas (*PMG* 708) is the most vivid example of this criticism: ‘The muse has made song queen; let the *aulos* dance in second place, for it is a servant’ (6–7).

of the instrument and many of its best players—overpowering the senses of the (democratic, citizen) chorus would seem to echo this sociopolitical critique of the ‘*aulos* revolution’, even as it emphasizes the pleasurable necessity of submitting to Dionysian experience. Similarly, the Chorus’ claim that it will not reject the *aulos* might allude to the cultic-mythic imperative of accepting the strange god, while at the same time recalling the present-day backlash against the instrument’s excesses—some in Athens were in fact ‘rejecting’ Dionysus’ increasingly assertive *aulos*.

In restaging ‘modern’ dithyramb, Sophocles may not have been merely indulging in generic gamesmanship or musical experimentation for its own sake. Like the song genres with which it is jarringly mixed, the dithyramb portends not joyful unity as it should, but reversal, fragmentation, and disaster.⁴⁰ Sophocles was, no less than Mahler or Shostakovich, a master of musical irony and ambivalence, an expert manipulator of the dramatic tension between the positive social and political connotations of musical forms and the inexorable tragic arc of the works in which they are ‘quoted’. We think of the brilliant paeanic odes of celebration in *Ajax* 693–705 and *Antigone* 100–161, or the ecstatic hymn to Mount Cithaeron and the gods in *OT* 1086–1109, all of which through their words and, with deeper psychological impact, their music, set up expectations of human and divine peace, order, and harmony that the audience knows will be dashed in the course of the play.⁴¹ I would propose that Sophocles’ ‘quotation’ of dithyramb in its up-to-the-minute guise creates a more complicated kind of ambivalence. For dithyramb, unlike the paean or the epinician, genres fairly distant from the lived musical experience of Athenians, already invited critical ambivalence in the real world of civic *mousikê*, something that, I have argued, the text

⁴⁰ The ironic suspense generated by the musical celebration of 205–224 is compounded in the second *stasimon*, a quasi-epinician ode for Heracles, in which the Chorus imagines that ‘the *aulos* with its lovely shout will soon go up again for you, sounding a not unfitting strain, but one like divine lyre music’ (640–642). The irony of the musical language is especially ripe here. The *aulos* music that will greet Heracles will be entirely ‘unfitting’ a heroic homecoming, and hardly like that of the celebratory lyre; rather, it will be the tragic *aulos* that accompanies the laments of the Chorus and Heracles. Cf. Easterling (1982) 153. On tragedy’s sense of its music as *alyros*, anti-lyric, see Wilson (1999/2000) 433.

⁴¹ Cf. Segal (1981a) 239; Wilson (2005) 188. It should be noted that the abovementioned passages all feature a ‘Dionysian’ element, which could be read as a metatheatrical reminder of the performing Chorus’ tragic identity, thus signalling the ambivalence lurking beneath the celebration. See Kowalzig (2007b); Henrichs (1994/1995). A similar effect may be intended in the *Trachiniae* ode, but there the dithyrambic persona of the Chorus is made explicit in a way it is not in these other songs.

implicitly acknowledges. Its traditional political and religious efficacy was beginning to be questioned as attention increasingly focused on the *aulos* and its purely musical effects. Sophocles, I suggest, exploits the perceived destabilization of this civically important medium for dramatic effect, to foreshadow the ultimate unviability of any musical expression save lament in the play's damaged universe.

Sophocles elsewhere addressed the contemporary culture of the *aulos*. In the unassigned fr. 768 Radt, someone remarks, 'For he blows no longer on small pipes (*auliskoi*), but with wild blasts, without a head-band (*phorbeia*)'. Longinus 3.1 tells us that these lines compare Boreas to an aulete. The sort of aulete Sophocles has in mind seems fairly extraordinary, however, and we may wonder whether he is not conjuring up a virtuoso showman of the New Music, a star player such as Pronomos of Thebes, capable of startlingly real sound effects and all manner of unrestrained mimetic bodily movements (cf. Paus. 9.12).⁴² Plato makes special mention of popular instrumentalists of the new school who imitate the 'noises of winds' (*Resp.* 397a), he presumably has the likes of Pronomos in mind.

Then there is the intriguing possibility that the *aulos* played a key role in the *Inachus*, probably a satyr play. In a scholion to Aesch. *PV* 574, we are told that in the play 'Sophocles actually brings Argus onstage singing'. Lloyd-Jones makes the ingenious suggestion that the play featured a musical competition between a 'singing' Argus and Hermes, who in most versions of the story overcomes Argus with the sound of his syrinx.⁴³ Apparently he does here as well. Two fragments, probably spoken by the Chorus, seem to refer to the god's playing of the instrument (fr. 269c.7, 'I hear the syrinx'; 269c.21, in which Hermes is identified by the ψοφήματα 'noises' he makes). It is possible that the actor impersonating Hermes played an actual syrinx onstage (which in itself would have been novel). But we might conjecture that the actor only mimed playing one, and that its sound was supplied by the mimetic *aulos*, the panpipes' city cousin.⁴⁴ Further, if a musical contest

⁴² Concert and choral auletes normally wore the *phorbeia* to support their mouth and cheeks and to 'take some of the strain involved in blowing' (West 1992, 89), but its dramatic removal could conceivably have been part of auletic showboating. I wonder whether Pronomos' celebrated facial gestures (Paus. 9.12.4) were not all the more remarkable for his going without (at least on occasion) the *phorbeia*.

⁴³ Lloyd-Jones (1996) 115–116.

⁴⁴ For miming on prop instruments, see Ar. *Plut.* 290, with scholia. For the mimetic intimacy between *aulos* and syrinx, see Eur. *IA* 576–578: Paris, still an oxherd on Mt. Ida, 'plays barbarian tunes on his syrinx, blowing (?) *mimēmata* 'imitations' of the *auloi* of Olympus on his reeds'.

was represented in the play, we might imagine that the dramatic aulete was given a virtuosic part—despite the humbleness of the syrinx, Hermes was after all a spellbinding musician. The permissiveness of satyr play would conceivably have allowed Sophocles considerable latitude for musical fun. As I discuss below, Hermes' lyric music in another satyr play, the *Ichneutae*, may also have been represented in the 'modern' style.

4. *Sophoclean Strings*

Psell. *Trag.* 5, drawing on sources that may go back to Aristoxenus, reports that Sophocles introduced the Lydian mode to tragedy, but adds that it was better suited to the citharodic style (*tropos*).⁴⁵ Indeed, the association of Sophoclean drama with the Lydian mode may be a reduction of a more pervasive engagement with *kitharôidia*. This musical medium had long been among the most celebrated musical forms in Athens; its stars took central stage at the Panathenaic musical contests.⁴⁶ There is evidence that both Aeschylus and Euripides drew inspiration from *kitharôidia*, the former from the archaic style and the latter from the daring novelties introduced by a newer wave of citharodes, above all Timotheus of Miletus.⁴⁷ Yet Sophocles' relationship to *kitharôidia* may have been more profound than his rivals'. We have fragments of *Thamyras*, which had the mythical citharode as its protagonist, and testimony to the effect that Sophocles himself 'took up and played the *kithara* only in *Thamyras*' (*Life* 5; cf. Ath. 1.20e–f, Eust. *Il.* 381.8). Although both Aeschylus and Euripides composed plays featuring mythical lyre players, there is no evidence that either tragedian played the *kithara* in one of his productions. Sophocles' performance was a stunning *coup de théâtre*—attempted by him only once—which so captured the public imagination that it was commemorated, according to the *Life*, in a painting in the Stoa Poikile.

The fame attached to the role must have been due not only to its dramatic novelty, but its unique frisson of cultural glamour. Sophocles not only played the doomed archetypal agonist of myth—a role that echoed his own lyric past and tragic present—he restaged in the Theatre of

⁴⁵ The Lydian is elsewhere citharodic: Paus. 9.5.7; Ps-Plut. *De mus.* 15.1136c; Procl. *apud Phot. Bibl.* 320b.

⁴⁶ See now Power (2010) 425 ff.

⁴⁷ Aeschylus: Ar. *Ran.* 1281–1300; Euripides and Timotheus: Satyrus, *Life of Euripides* T 4.24 Kovacs; Plut. *Mor.* 795d.

Dionysus *kitharôidia*, a song genre that was already wildly popular, and, like the dithyramb, increasingly controversial.⁴⁸ This crossover of Athens' two preeminent musico-poetic media must have been immensely exciting for its audience. But as Peter Wilson shows in his penetrating analysis of the fragments, *Thamyras* used musical myth to mount a serious exploration of issues in contemporary Athenian *mousikê*.⁴⁹ I offer here only a few observations corollary to his discussion.

The popularity of *kitharôidia* was apparently thematized within *Thamyras* and characterized with a Dionysian intensity appropriate to tragedy. Someone (perhaps the Chorus) sings of being 'seized by a music-mad compulsion' caused by the 'lyre and the citharodic songs (*nomoi*) in which Thamyras makes outstanding music' (fr. 245).⁵⁰ Another fragment, in lyric hexameters, likely preserves part of a *nomos* actually performed to the *kithara* by Thamyras/Sophocles (fr. 242). It is not inconceivable that the play staged a *mousikos agôn* between Thamyras and the Muses, who may have made up the Chorus.⁵¹ Thamyras' *nomos*, which appears from fr. 242 to have related his own genealogy going back to Hermes, the inventor of the lyre, may have been his contest piece, as it were.⁵² If so, the encounter would not only have presented a vivid live enactment, with music, of the rather monochromatic Iliadic scene, its pitting of citharode (played with masterful irony by the tragedian) against tragic chorus would have had thrilling significance in terms of contemporary Athenian music. Indeed, the violent subordination of Thamyras to the Muses, who 'maimed him, and took from him his wondrous singing and made him forget his *kithara* playing' (*Il.* 2.599–600), is inseparable from the dissolution of his *kitharôidia* in the dark matter of tragedy, whose own music is conceived from within as essentially 'lyreless', *alyros* (cf. *OC* 1222)—it mimetically consumes, and notionally negates, all other music.

That point is verbally, musically, and perhaps visually made in a melic fragment that may come from Thamyras' lament following his defeat: 'Breaking the horn bound with gold, breaking the harmony of the strung

⁴⁸ Wilson (2009a) argues convincingly that Sophocles portrayed his Thamyras as a proto-New Musician, his hubristic confidence in his *technê* foreshadowing the ambitiousness of contemporary virtuosi.

⁴⁹ Wilson (2009a).

⁵⁰ The text is problematic; I cite the reading of Lloyd-Jones. Cf. Wilson (2009a) 67–69.

⁵¹ Lloyd-Jones (1996) 103.

⁵² Sophocles may have drawn on a long tradition of genealogical catalogue poetry in *kitharôidia*; cf. Power (2010) 301–302.

lyre' (fr. 244).⁵³ The confident singer of the self-aggrandizing *nomos* is now the maimed performer of lament, 'broken' like his *kithara*, deprived of his wondrous voice. (Although we can be sure that Sophocles' singing of this 'unmusical' lament was in fact musically beautiful). The transformation of Thamyras' musical identity was presumably dramatized not only by the change in genre (with its attendant harmonic, timbral, and ethical differences), but also by the instrumental accompaniment. If, as seems likely, Sophocles followed the Iliadic version of events, Thamyras has been deprived of his *kithara* playing. The now-useless instrument, its luxurious gold binding a reproachful reminder of past musical hubris, is fit only to be shattered. Thamyras may still be holding the *kithara* while he sings, but he does not play it. Rather, the *aulos* has claimed his song, sonically marking tragedy's inevitable triumph over *kitharôidia*.⁵⁴ As Sophocles puts it in fr. 849, which Welcker perhaps correctly assigned to *Thamyras* (cf. *TrGF* IV, 557), 'Piping is dear to laments, not the lyre'.

The fragmentary satyr play *Ichneutae* is another Sophoclean work that takes the music of the lyre as a central preoccupation. The satyr play's treatment of it is obviously far lighter than that in *Thamyras*, but the fragments suggest that Sophocles may have been similarly intent on reflecting contemporary musical culture in the mythical plot. The relevant lines concern the reaction of the satyrs to the sound of Hermes' newly invented lyre, which they have never before seen nor heard (243–337). The satyrs engage in a riddling exchange with Cyllene as they try to learn the source of the 'wondrous voice' (250; cf. 297) of the instrument that so confounds them (257), and that we should imagine is now being heard from offstage. The scene builds on traditional precedents. The reaction of a satyr chorus to a strange invention, including a musical instrument, appears to have been a longstanding set piece in satyr drama.⁵⁵ Sophocles is also playing with non-dramatic poetic traditions. The riddling description of the lyre as the mute creature (the tortoise) that in death gains a voice (300) has precedents in sympotic poetry; the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* already alludes to it (37–38).⁵⁶

⁵³ Transl. Lloyd-Jones (1996) 105. I follow Reiske in assigning the verses to Thamyras rather than the Chorus; cf. Wilson (2009a) 66.

⁵⁴ Fr. 241, three iambic trimeters grieving a lost richness of musical experience ('For gone are songs struck on harps, single pipes with the lyre'), may also belong to Thamyras. Significantly perhaps, they are spoken, not sung verses.

⁵⁵ Cf. Seaford (1984) 36, who suggests Hermes' syrinx would similarly have inspired satyric wonder in *Inachus*.

⁵⁶ Cf. Svenbro (1992).

The *Hymn's* description of Apollo's excitement at hearing Hermes' lyre for the first time (418–455) is clearly a model for the satyrs' reaction.

But I would propose that there is a modern musical subtext to the reaction scene in *Ichneutae*. That is, the strange music of Hermes' never-before-heard lyre might proleptically evoke the 'new *kitharôidia*' that took hold in Athens beginning around the middle of the fifth century, when Phrynis of Mytilene was victorious at the reorganized Panathenaea. This citharode was credited, among other innovations, with the addition of extra strings to the *kithara* (Plut. *Ages.* 10). Others such as Timotheus would follow suit in later decades.⁵⁷ With its added strings and the novel sonic effects produced on them, the *kithara* was very much being reinvented in the years *Ichneutae* was produced.⁵⁸ The excitable satyrs may be stand-ins for a fascinated yet occasionally befuddled Athenian public coming to terms with this ongoing reinvention of lyric tradition.

The language used by Cyllene and the satyrs to describe Hermes' music-making has, if the ear is receptive to it, a markedly 'anachronistic' tone, echoing the discourse of the New Music. Its implication is that the infant god is already, *avant la lettre*, a virtuoso citharode in the modern style:

KY. καὶ τοῦτο λύπης ἔστ' ἄκεστρον καὶ παραψυκτήριον
 κείνῳ μόνον, χαίρει δ' ἄλλων καὶ τι προσφω[ών]
 μέλος.
 ξύμφωνον ἐξαίρει γὰρ αὐτὸν αἰόλισμα τῆς λύρας.
 οὕτως ὁ παῖς θανόντι θηρὶ φθέγμ' ἐμμηχανήσατο.

XO. χερ]οψάλακτός τις ὁμφὰ κατοιχνεῖ τόπου,
 πρεπτά (δ' ἤ)δη τόνου φάσματ' ἔγ-
 χωρ' ἐπανθεμίζει.

CYLLENE: And that [the lyre] is the only cure and comfort for unhappiness he's got. He enjoys letting go and giving voice to song; for the quick succession of varied tones played harmoniously on the lyre transports him [lit. "lifts him up"]. So that is how the child contrived a voice for the dead creature.

CHORUS: A string-plucked voice spreads over the region! Conspicuous now are the fantasies of sound that it scatters like flowers all over the place!⁵⁹

(*Ichneutae* 325–330)

⁵⁷ Phrynis' victory was in 446 BC (schol. *Nub.* 970, with Davison 1958, 40–41). Sophocles' acquaintance and fellow tragedian Ion of Chios composed an elegiac hymn to an 'eleven-stringed lyre' (fr. 32 West), which may point to Sophocles' own interest in technical advances in string playing. See Power (2007).

⁵⁸ The date of the play is unknown. The extremely early dates proposed by Wilamowitz and others seem unlikely; a later date of 430–420 BC seems more probable. See Maltese (1982) 12.

⁵⁹ Text and adapted translation from Lloyd-Jones (1996) 168–169.

Hermes' enjoyment in 'letting himself go' through music evokes the ethos of liberation and release that infused the New Music, to the consternation of many conservatives.⁶⁰ That impression is reinforced by the verb ἐξάγει and its subject αἰόλισμα. As we saw in our discussion of the *Trachiniae* ode, the choral performative ἀείρομαι 'I rise up' recalls the flight (and flightiness) that was so conceptually pervasive in the New Dithyramb. That imagery is even more strikingly evoked in ἐξάγει: Hermes' lyric music provides him 'lift off'. This music takes the brilliant form of αἰόλισμα, a term that belongs to a collection of buzzwords in the New Music lexicon that 'stress the music's heterogeneity, variability, and adaptability'.⁶¹ My translation, 'a quick succession of varied tones', attempts to capture both the aesthetic of speed that was cultivated by the new generation of string players (cf. Pl. *Leg.* 669e), as well as the tonal variety prized by New Musicians.⁶² At the same time as it indicates the virtuoso modernism of the music, however, αἰόλισμα recalls a traditional epithet of the tortoise-shell lyre, αἰόλον 'dappled' (*Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 33). Lyric simplicity and citharodic sophistication are thus deliberately conflated. Similarly, the verb ἐξάγει harks back to *Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 39, where the god first 'lifts up' (ἀείρας) the tortoise whose shell he will use to make his lyre.

The satyrs' melic response further intimates the modernity of Hermes' music. The flowery language of their song has a suspiciously dithyrambic (or indeed 'new citharodic') tone to it; they too have been 'lifted up' by the lyre, it seems.⁶³ Indeed, we are once again in the 'aerial' realm; the god's airy 'fantasies of sound' float lightly above. All of these verbal cues would, of course, have been more obvious to the audience if the actor/lyre-player in the part of Hermes (now still invisible) were playing in the style of a Phrynis or Timotheus.

It has been argued that Euripides took the exchange between the satyrs and Cyllene as a model for a scene in his *Antiope* in which Amphion, the mortal inventor of *kitharôidia* (Heraclid. Pont. fr. 157 Wehrli), sings to his lyre for a Chorus of rustics who have never heard such music.⁶⁴ From this play, we have a lyric hexameter that probably belonged to a *nomos*

⁶⁰ Cf. Csapo (2004) 229.

⁶¹ Csapo (2004) 229.

⁶² Cf. Anderson (1994) 90–92. For *aiol-* words in connection to 'new *kitharôidia*', see Hunter (1997) 101; Power (2010) 346.

⁶³ On the ornate emptiness of dithyrambic language, see Csapo (2004) 228. On fusion between dithyramb and *kitharôidia*, see Power (2013).

⁶⁴ Maltese (1982) 12; cf. Wilson (1999/2000) 440.

performed by Amphion (fr. 182a Kannicht). Wilamowitz made the ingenious suggestion that an unassigned melic fragment of Euripides belongs to the Chorus' amazed reaction to Amphion's unprecedented song: 'Golden wings are around my back and the winged sandals of the Sirens fit me; rising up (ἀρθεῖς) I will mount to the heavenly vault to meet with Zeus' (fr. 911 Kannicht). Assuming Wilamowitz was right, the *Antiope* Chorus experiences a rapturous 'flight of fancy' in response to citharodic music that is similar to what we see in the *Ichneutae*. Wilson has made the further argument that what inspires the characteristically 'New Musical' reaction of the Chorus may well be 'a hint of the 'New Musical' about Amphion's song'.⁶⁵ That is, Euripides portrayed his first citharode as a new citharode making a strong impression on the uncomprehending masses, just as I am suggesting Sophocles did with Hermes in his satyr play. The similarities may not be coincidental. It is conceivable that along with the set-up of the reaction scene in *Ichneutae*, Euripides emulated its musical critical subtext as well.

5. Conclusion

I hope that from this highly selective survey of 'musical moments' in Sophocles' art and life, a better sense of the complexity of his relationship to music has emerged. I have tried to stress his forwardness rather than 'middleness', his sharpness rather than his sweetness in musical matters.⁶⁶ This discussion could take many different paths, each revealing another facet of Sophocles' handling of music. There is for instance his marked interest in what Aristoxenus calls 'alien instruments' (ἑκφυλα ὄργανα, fr. 97 Wehrli). This comes to the fore in the fragments, where a weirder Sophocles often seems to peek through. *Thamyras*, *Mysians*, *Niobe*, and *Tympanistae* included lush evocations of exotic harps and *auloi* (fr. 238, 241, 412, 450, 644). Sophocles would have known these instruments from the eastward-looking Athenian symposia at which they were fashionable, and brought from there to the demotic theatre some of their outlandish, aristocratic chic.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Wilson (1999/2000) 441.

⁶⁶ For Sophoclean 'sharpness' (or 'bitterness', *pikron*), see Plut. *Mor.* 79b, with Pelling (2007) 216.

⁶⁷ Symposium-to-theatre traffic in exotica was also part of dithyrambic culture: Amphis fr. 239 K-A. 'Alien instruments' appear to have been a preoccupation of the New Music (see e.g. Telestes *PMG* 808 and 810, and the Euripidean passages cited below).

Exotic cult music was also an inspiration. *Tympanistae* probably took its name from its Chorus of Thracian Dionysus or Cybele devotees who carried tambourines called *tympana* that were characteristic of ecstatic rites.⁶⁸ Aeschylus had already described the 'deeply terrifying sound' of the *tympanon* in his *Edonians* (fr. 57), and *tympana* are a recurring image in Euripides' Bacchic fantasias.⁶⁹ The instrument may well have been played offstage during the latter's *Bacchae*, or perhaps even by the Chorus members themselves (cf. 156, 513). But Sophocles' titular Chorus of tambourine players must have foregrounded this most alien of instruments in the dramatic action and sonic texture of the play to a far greater extent, and probably at a much earlier date. That such a musical-theatrical *coup* should come from Sophocles should not be a surprise.

⁶⁸ Cf. Sutton (1984) 150.

⁶⁹ Eur. *HF* 889, *Hel.* 1347, *Bacch.* 59, 124, 156, 513, *Cyc.* 65, 205, fr. 586; cf. Diogenes *TrGF* I, 45 fr. 1.3.

THE LANGUAGE OF SOPHOCLES

Luigi Battezzato*

1. *Introduction*

Is 'language' all we have of Sophocles? Music, dance, costumes, staging: all is lost. Language remains. And not only that: 'language', according to several philosophical and critical approaches, is, quite literally, *all*: reality, for humans, *is* language.¹ This approach may be seen either as all-encompassing, or as reductionist, a 'post-structural fallacy, reducing what can appear only through language to a solely linguistic existence'.² Pre-structuralist literary critics, in any case, gave special attention to his style,³ which, according to Buffon's well-known motto, 'is the man'.⁴ They have often noted the stylistic peculiarities of Sophocles' text, which can be at the same time colloquial and sublime, piercingly clear and darkly allusive. As Budelmann (2000a, 10) states:

Sophoclean language ... can engage different spectators and readers of different times because, repeatedly, it makes them both know and not know something. ... it often gives them a degree of information, and at the same time withholds full knowledge.

The case of the language of Sophocles is especially complex in that, in his plays, deception, interpretation, and identity are crucial themes, and moreover themes which exist only through language: 'Sophocles makes the ambiguity of language impinge inescapably on the ambiguity of personal identity'.⁵

* I thank the editor and D.J. Mastronarde for comments and corrections.

¹ See e.g. the seminal work of Rorty (1967). In literary criticism, many structuralist approaches consider language primary. On language and interpretation in tragedy, see Godhill (1986) 1–56, (1997a).

² Segal (1995) 179.

³ See Campbell (1879); Bruhn (1899); Earp (1944) and the overview in Budelmann (2000a) 1–6. For a sophisticated contemporary approach, see Avezzù (forthcoming).

⁴ Saisselin (1958); Campbell (1879) 1.

⁵ Segal (1995) 141. See also Segal (1995) 151 'the grammatical categories of language itself, the ease of shifting from masculine to neuter in the inflection of the pronominal adjective

This chapter will offer a sample of the various approaches to the playwright's language. The goal is to offer readers both a survey of available resources and indications for areas of future research. The focus will be more on the strictly linguistic, rather than more generally interpretive aspects, which are covered by other chapters; the final section will give an example of how the interpretation of language can be crucial both for Sophocles' audience and characters.

2. *Words: Phonology and Morphology*

The language of Greek poetry is different from the language spoken by its audience. If this can be said of almost any poetical tradition for syntax, vocabulary, rhetoric, and content, a number of poetical traditions, including that of ancient Greece, differ from the language of their audiences with respect to phonology and morphology as well.⁶ The distance is very large in the Greek epic tradition, which mixes phonological and morphological characteristics belonging to different dialect groups. As for Attic tragedy, sung passages show a clear difference in phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary⁷ from formal spoken and written Attic, as far as we can reconstruct it,⁸ but even spoken passages of tragedy present distinctive features, even if these are less frequent or striking. The following paragraphs draw attention to some of the most notable features.⁹

The spoken lines of tragedy include certain words which retain the common Greek phonology; note for instance [ā] (written α) in linguistic contexts where Attic would normally change this into [ē] (written η), e.g. *Ant.* 141 λοχᾶγῶι 'military commanders' (instead of a non-existent Attic

"one", seem to lead the investigators astray from what will solve the mystery' (commenting on *OT* 118–120); Segal (1995) 162: 'Oedipus' words seem to speak a truth that he himself cannot (consciously) utter, as if his language is somehow out of his control'.

⁶ See esp. Colvin (2007) 49–63; Cassio (2008); Tribulato (2010); on the language of specific genres, see D'Alessio (2009); Hackstein (2010); Silk (2010); Rutherford (2010); Bers (2010) with references. On syntax, see Wackernagel (2009).

⁷ For a survey with examples, see Hutchinson (2001) 427–454.

⁸ For inscriptions, see Meisterhans/Schwyzler (1900³); Threatte (1980), (1996). On the language of comedy and 'colloquial' language, see Willi (2003) 232–269; on the difficulty of identifying 'colloquial' language in tragedy, see Collard (2005) 350–360.

⁹ For fuller presentations, see Hoffmann/Debrunner/Scherer (1969³) 102–114; West (1990) xxv–liii (extremely useful, focusing on Aeschylus); Mastronarde (2002) 81–96 (excellent general presentation, focusing on Euripides); Kazcko (2008).

^{}λοχηγοί), 715 νᾱός ‘of the ship’ (gen. of ναῦς, attested alongside Attic νεώς, attested in e.g. *OT* 923),¹⁰ 1196 ποδᾱγός ‘guide, attendant’.¹¹ Tragedy took these words from linguistic and poetical traditions that were expressed in a non-Attic dialectal ‘colouring’.¹² Moreover, ‘in those aspects in which the everyday Attic dialect is most “provincial” (different from common Greek or Ionic), tragedy favours a common Greek or Ionic (or old Attic) colouring in the dialogue’.¹³ This is why we find e.g. Ionic -σσ- and -ρσ-, not Attic -ττ- -ρρ-: see e.g. *OT* 1062 and *Ant.* 559 θάρσει, *Aj.* 782 φυλάσσειν as opposed to *Ar. Ach.* 830 θάρρει, *Vesp.* 69 φυλάττειν.¹⁴ Tragedy also makes use of Ionic forms such ἔς alongside Attic εἰς, and of old Attic ξύν alongside σύν.¹⁵

Lyric passages of tragedy have a markedly non-Attic colouring; in particular we find [ā] (written α) instead of Attic *eta* [ē]. This [ā] represents the original common Greek sound, modified by Attic and Ionic; it is conventionally considered a ‘Doric’ trait, recalling the language of choral lyric. In lyric, note also the ‘Doric’ contraction of ā + ο/ω to ā, as in e.g. *Ant.* 380, *OT* 496 Οἰδιπόδα ‘of Oedipus’ (as in *Pind. Pyth.* 4.263; see the uncontracted form Οἰδιπόδαο in e.g. *Od.* 11.271), and in the genitive plural of first declension nouns and adjectives, as in e.g. *OT* 1108 Νυμφᾶν. The normal Attic endings are -οῦ and -ῶν, frequently attested in tragic dialogue.¹⁶

As for morphology, in the dative plurals of α- and ο-declensions, both lyric and non-lyric passages of tragedy use longer forms [-αισι(ν) and -οισι(ν)] alongside the usual -αῖς and -οῖς. Until 420 BC, Attic inscriptions frequently

¹⁰ Changes are as follows: νᾱός > νηός (Attic and Ionic shift from [ā] to [ē]: see e.g. Schwyzler 1939, 185–191; Willi 2003, 233–234; Cassio 2008, 63–64) > νεώς (quantitative metathesis: see e.g. KB I 172–174; Schwyzler 1939, 245–246; Méndez Dosuna 1993; Probert 2006, 85–86; Cassio 2008, 65–66).

¹¹ The Attic vocalism is attested in tragedy in the anonymous fragment *TrGF* II fr. 146a.3 ποδηγέ. See also the verb in e.g. *Pl. Leg.* 899a4 ποδηγεῖ.

¹² See Björck (1950); Mastronarde (2002) 82–83.

¹³ Mastronarde (2002) 82.

¹⁴ See e.g. Schwyzler (1939) 316–321 and 284–285; Mastronarde (2002) 82; Willi (2003) 237; Kazcko (2008) 251–252.

¹⁵ See Ellendt/Genthe (1872) 212–213 and 705; West (1990) xli (favouring printing εἰς and ξύν whenever metrically possible in Aeschylus); Willi (2003) 234–235 and 237–238; Mastronarde (2002) 85 (favouring printing ἔς whenever metrically possible in Euripides, following Diggle); Finglass (2009b) 212–215 (who, discussing ἔς and εἰς, favours printing the majority manuscript reading where metre allows either form). I side with Diggle and Mastronarde on the issue of ἔς in tragedy. Note that Sophocles, unlike Aeschylus and Euripides, uses the Ionic form μοῦνος, even in trimeters: see e.g. *OT* 304, 1418 [and Aesch. (?) *PV* 804]. The three tragedians use the Ionic ξείνος as well as ξένος.

¹⁶ West (1990) xxv–xxviii.

employ the forms -ασι (with long alpha) and -ησι, which Aeschylus may have used. Lloyd-Jones and Wilson occasionally print such forms in Sophocles (*Ant.* 589, Θρήσσησιν, in lyrics).¹⁷

The dual is another feature where Attic tragic language differs from ordinary Attic. This is a conservative characteristic which must have been much in evidence in spoken Attic, and is very frequently attested in Aristophanes: it must have been perceived as specifically Attic, colloquial, or 'parochial', which explains its relative scarcity in tragedy.¹⁸ Sophocles, however, uses dual forms more frequently than Aeschylus and Euripides, mixing the colloquial and the sublime. For instance, Oedipus often uses dual forms when affectionately addressing or mentioning his daughters: see e.g. *OT* 1472–1474 (a striking passage), 1503, 1511; *OC* 445, 493, 531, 1640. In *OT* 1462 τὰν δ' ἀθλίαιν οἰκτρὰν τε παρθένοι ἐμαῖν, the manuscripts preserve the form with [a], which inscriptional Attic and other tragedians avoided, preferring τῶ, τοῖν.¹⁹ The colloquial tone of the dual is also well suited to aggressive language: see Creon in *Ant.* 769 and *OC* 818.

Tragic morphology, unlike standard Attic, may omit syllabic and temporal augment. The omission is common in lyrics,²⁰ and occurs sporadically in messenger speeches, where it was probably felt to be an epicizing feature.²¹ Note also the epic third-person plural active ending in e.g. ἀπέδραν for ἀπέδρασαν *Aj.* 167, *Trach.* 504 (in lyric) and in messenger speeches (only Eur. *Hipp.* 1247²² and *Phoen.* 1246). The distribution of these phenomena demonstrates the degree of linguistic variety found even in non-lyric

¹⁷ Barrett (1964) on Eur. *Hipp.* 101; West (1990) xxxvi.

¹⁸ For statistics, see Cuny (1906) 94, noting that Euripides and, more often, Sophocles admitted more dual forms in their later plays, whereas Aeschylus, writing in a more elevated style, used the dual less frequently; see in general Cuny (1906) 88–161; Moorhouse (1982) 2–4; Willi (2003) 253–254.

¹⁹ Contrast *OT* 1459–1460, where Oedipus uses the plural for his two sons, expressing no affection. See Hasse (1881) 3–8; Kühner/Blass (1890) 604–605; Cuny (1906) 158; Cooper (1972) 113–114; Willi (2003) 244; Finglass (2007) on Soph. *El.* 977. On variations between dual and plural, see Kühner/Gerth (1898) 69–74 and Mastronarde (2002) 86. Oedipus also uses the plural for his daughters: e.g. *OT* 1465, 1480. See also Griffith (1999) on *Ant.* 2–3.

²⁰ See Lautensach (1899) 174–175 and 178–181; Diggle (1981) 65–66.

²¹ See Lautensach (1899) 165–174 and 178; Page (1938) 155–156 on *Med.* 1141; Bergson (1959) (arguing, unpersuasively, that this is due to metrical constraints); Rijksbaron (2006) (arguing that the feature is more frequent than usually recognized; some forms considered to be historical presents should be analyzed as unaugmented imperfects); Battezzato (2007); Finglass (2007) on Soph. *El.* 715.

²² See Barrett (1964) ad loc.

passages. Articles are often used as demonstratives²³ and occasionally as relative pronouns,²⁴ and are often omitted in places where Attic prose would need them.²⁵

3. *Words and Sentences: Syntax and Vocabulary*

Differences from non-poetic Attic are much in evidence also in the area of syntax. A very full treatment of poetic syntax is given by Cooper (1998) and Cooper (2002), offering detailed comparison with prose usage.²⁶ Moorhouse (1982) offers a full coverage of the syntax of Sophocles.

Among the distinctive characteristics one should note the lack of prepositions accompanying, among other syntactic structures, the genitive of separation, the locative dative, and the accusative of direction.²⁷

Moreover, almost all disyllabic prepositions can be placed after a noun or pronoun (*Ant.* 73, φίλου μέτα ‘with a person from the family’) or a noun phrase (e.g. *El.* 700, πολλῶν ἀρματηλατῶν μέτα ‘with many charioteers’). The preposition may be separated from the noun or pronoun it governs by a number of words: see e.g. *Ant.* 70, ἐμοῦ γ’ ἂν ἡδέως δρώης μέτα ‘I would not be content for you to act with me’.²⁸ This type of postposition is called anastrophe; when it occurs, the accent is moved to the first syllable.²⁹ Anastrophe occurs in 15.9% of the occurrences of ἀπό, ἐπί, κατά, μετά, παρά, ὑπό, διά, περί, ὑπέρ in the iambic trimeters of Sophocles, roughly the same percentage as in Aeschylus (16.3%), whereas in Euripides the figure rises sharply (26.3%).³⁰

²³ E.g. *OC* 742, 1699; Kühner/Gerth (1898) 575–586.

²⁴ See e.g. Jebb (1889) on *OC* 747, *Ant.* 1086; Barrett (1964) on Eur. *Hipp.* 525–526; Diggle (1994) 32–33 and 466–467; Kühner/Gerth (1898) 587–588.

²⁵ Ellend/Genthe (1872) 492–498.

²⁶ See also Kühner/Gerth (1898) and (1904); Schwyzer/Debrunner (1950).

²⁷ See Moorhouse (1982) 66, 86–87 and 45; Bers (1984) 62–101; Mastronarde (2002) 86–87.

²⁸ Even without anastrophe, prepositions may be separated from the noun they govern: *OT* 857–858; Finglass (2007) on Soph. *El.* 78.

²⁹ Devine/Stephens (1994) 364–365 and (2000) 211–222; Probert (2003) 126–128.

³⁰ Statistics adapted from Baechle (2007) 145–146 and (in general) 139–207 (very useful). Note that ἀνά does not undergo anastrophe in the trimeters of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. In prose anastrophe occurs only with πέρι: Kühner/Gerth (1898) 554; Devine/Stephens (2000) 213–215.

Note also the ‘internal acc[usative]’ (of the kind often called ‘in apposition to the sentence’), specifying that in which the action of a verb consists and results’, a structure typical of poetry and of tragedy in particular:³¹ see e.g. Soph. *El.* 965–966, ὥστε σὸν ποτ’ ἢ καμὸν γένος/βλαστειν ἐάσαι, πημονὴν αὐτῷ σαφῇ ‘to allow your children or mine to come into being, bringing obvious trouble for himself’.

Other traits that differentiate the syntax of Sophocles, and of tragedy in general, from formal Attic prose (historiography, orators, Plato, inscriptions) include the infinitive of purpose or result,³² the preference for ὥς, ὥς ἄν and ὅπως ἄν over ἵνα for introducing final clauses,³³ and the avoidance of ὅτι introducing causal clauses.³⁴ Tenses, voices, and moods of verbs in classical Greek, and in Sophocles in particular, have been well covered.³⁵

A final area where the language of Sophocles is markedly different from formal Attic is the choice of vocabulary.³⁶ Sophocles uses several ‘poetic’ words from the epic and lyric tradition. See e.g. the epic phrase ὠρώρει βοή in the messenger speech at the end of *Oedipus at Colonus*: ‘when they came to the end of their lamenting, and still no sound rose up (οὐδ’ ἔτ’ ὠρώρει βοή), there was silence, and suddenly the voice of someone hailed him’ (*OC* 1621–1624). The phrase imitates *Il.* 11.500, 11.530, 13.169, 13.540, 16.267 βοή δ’ ἄσβεστος ὀρώρει ‘an unquenchable cry arose’.³⁷ The text refutes the very Homeric phrase it alludes to: in Sophocles the human voice is not ‘unquenchable’, but silenced. The extraordinary epic vocabulary makes its appearance at the crucial point when human voices cease and a divine voice is about to be heard, urging Oedipus to his mysterious meeting with the sacred and the otherworldly.

Sophocles also coins new words (especially compound adjectives, see e.g. *OT* 510 ἡδύπολις, 866 ὑψίποδες, *Ant.* 370 ὑψίπολις) (on metaphors see below, section 5). A notable category is the group of abstract nouns ending in

³¹ Barrett (1964) on Eur. *Hipp.* 752–757; see Kühner/Gerth (1898) 284–285; Moorhouse (1982) 45–46; Diggle (1994) 191–192 and 223–224; Mastronarde (2002) 87; Finglass (2007) on *El.* 130, 564, 966.

³² E.g. *El.* 406: see Moorhouse (1982) 237–238, Mastronarde (2002) 88.

³³ Moorhouse (1982) 284.

³⁴ Moorhouse (1982) 301–302: in Sophocles only *Trach.* 464.

³⁵ See Moorhouse (1982) 176–236; Allan (2003) and (2006); Rijksbaron (2006²) and below, n41.

³⁶ For general surveys, see Campbell (1879) 90–104; Bruhn (1899) 138–153; compare Mastronarde (2002) 93.

³⁷ See also *Od.* 24.48. For ὠρώρει, compare *Il.* 18.498, Aesch. *Ag.* 653. On the silence, see Markantonatos (2007) 133–134.

-σις, -μα, -ία, -εία: Sophocles uses them with increasing frequency in his last works, echoing the contemporary linguistic trends of scientific, historical, and philosophical prose.³⁸

The difference from standard Attic is not diminished in satyr-drama. 'By most of the available stylistic indices, the language of Sophocles' satyr-plays stands very close to—indeed is often indistinguishable from—that of his tragedies, while deviating sharply from the practice of Comedy. This is especially the case for the diction and meter of the dialogue scenes' (Griffith 2006, 59), even if, as Griffith himself notes, sentences are in general shorter and simpler than in Sophoclean tragedy.

4. *Words and Speakers: Pragmatics and Word Order*

Several different grammatically correct sentences may convey (roughly) the same meaning. Why do individual speakers choose a particular one? Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that tries to answer this and several other questions. Scholars have offered diverging definitions of pragmatics. 'The central topics of inquiry include implicature, presupposition, speech acts, deixis, and reference', as well as conversation analysis and politeness theory.³⁹ According to Dik (2007) 4, pragmatics addresses questions which were formerly considered a matter of 'style', but which 'can be described either by reference to the external context (e.g. forms of address or politeness phenomena) ... or by the surrounding text (to greater or smaller extent: aspect choice, definiteness, deictic reference, discourse particles)'.⁴⁰ Pragmatics, broadly defined, is a promising tool for research on the language of Greek drama. The present section will offer a selective discussion of the influence of pragmatic factors on syntax and word order;⁴¹ it will then review some aspects of politeness theory and sociolinguistics.

³⁸ Long (1968).

³⁹ Huang (2010) 341. See Cummings (2010); Huang (2007); Horn/Ward (2004); Levinson (1983).

⁴⁰ See also Bakker (2010), focusing on two 'test cases', deixis and tense/temporal reference. Other aspects are discussed in Slings (1992) and (1997), in several papers in de Jong/Rijksbaron (2006), D'Alessio (2009) (on lyrics).

⁴¹ Several studies also discuss verbal tense and aspect from a pragmatic point of view: see Lloyd (1999); Mastronarde (2002) 87–88; Bakker (2010) 161–166 with bibliography. Deixis is another important area which cannot be treated here: see Bakker (2010) 152–161. On deixis, see the papers in Felson (2004).

The pragmatic study of Greek word order started in the 1990s.⁴² Two key concepts in this respect are 'topic' and 'focus':⁴³ 'Topic is what the sentence is about; focus is what is predicated about the topic'.⁴⁴ A topic is normally a piece of given (or easily inferred) information; it often constitutes old or generally known discourse. Focus is normally a new piece of information ('information focus'), or something contrasted with other possible pieces of information ('contrastive focus'). Focus function may be implemented by nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs or verbs. The same applies for topic function, even if verbs are less frequent in this capacity.⁴⁵

Ancient Greek, like many other languages, marks topic and focus elements prosodically.⁴⁶ For instance, when in focus, personal pronouns are emphatic and orthotonic, whereas they are unemphatic (clitic) when out of focus.⁴⁷ Focus and topic elements are also marked by word order: the beginning of a sentence is a preferred landing position for topic and focus elements. Dik (1995) argued that, in Greek sentences, topic, if not implicit, always comes first; it is then followed by the focus element, by the verb, and (if present) by the rest of the sentence.

Topic is fronted in the case of the so-called prolepsis, as in Soph. *Phil.* 444, τοῦτον οἶσθ' εἰ ζῶν κυρεῖ; 'do you know if he is living?'. Philoctetes had spoken about Thersites in the previous sentence, and highlights τοῦτον at the beginning of the question. As Fraser (2001) 33 notes, 'the proleptic element has a double function, as a regular object in the main clause, and as a co-referent with the inflection of the subordinate verb. The construction is, in structural terms, overlapping, with a prosodically and communicatively emphatic element in common'. The order is particularly frequent in drama: 'this might be

⁴² See Devine/Stephens (1994) 456–497; Dik (1995); Devine/Stephens (2000); Battezzato (2000) = (2008) 81–101 (with corrections); Dik (2007). Baechle (2007) stresses metrical conditions and vocabulary selection as crucial factors in the choice of word order. Fraser (2002) stresses the importance of prosodic factors in word order (longer words are placed to the right). Fraser (2002) 52 notes that 'there is ... a strong tendency for pronominal subjects to precede the verb'; that is however better explained pragmatically, rather than prosodically. In a pro-drop language such as Greek (that is, a language that does not require the explicit presence of a subject in each clause) pronouns are present only when they are stressed (e.g. contrasting focus; resumed topic; etc.).

⁴³ On this, see e.g. Gunde (2004); Dik (2007) 31–34 and *passim*; Battezzato (2008) 15 and 88–95 with bibliography.

⁴⁴ Gundel/Fretheim (2004) 176.

⁴⁵ Dik (2007) 56–58.

⁴⁶ Devine/Stephens (1994) 456–497. See also Dik (2003); Probert (2003) 115–116 and 150–151.

⁴⁷ Devine/Stephens (1994) 475–477; see also Devine/Stephens (2000) 204–222.

expected from a topic-based linking function, as proposed by Gonda (1958): there is less burden on the memory if the topic of the following clause [in this case εἰ ζῶν κυρεῖ;] is already stated in the previous one [τοῦτον οἶσθ'].⁴⁸

Topic and focus elements may occur at the same time in a sentence, as in *OT* 149–150:

Φοῖβος δ' ὁ πέμψας τάσδε μαντείας ἄμα
σωτήρ θ' ἔκοιτο καὶ νόσου παυστήριος.

And may Phoebus, who sent these prophecies, come to preserve us and to put a stop to the plague.

Φοῖβος is topic, σωτήρ focus in the first main clause, and νόσου παυστήριος focus in the second main clause (νόσου παυστήριος [ἔκοιτο] 'come to put a stop to the plague').

It is disputed whether sentence-initial is the only possible position for pragmatically marked elements in Greek.⁴⁹ Dik (1995) and (2007), as well as Slings (1997) 173, argue for a rigid order Topic-Focus-rest of the sentence.⁵⁰ This is not accepted by all. For instance, in *Aj.* 970, θεοὶς τέθνηκεν οὗτος, οὐ κείνοισιν, οὐ. 'it is the gods that killed him, not they, no!', θεοὶς is clearly contrastive focus, but the pronoun οὗτος is best analyzed as topic, following Goldstein (2008), rather than as a 'Remainder' (one 'of those constituents that do not have Topic or Focus function': following Dik (2007) 48, who does not specify the topic of the sentence).

The interpretation of what in any given sentence is topic or focus may also be controversial.⁵¹ *Aj.* 966–967 reads ἐμοὶ πικρὸς τέθνηκεν ἦ κείνοις γλυκύς, | αὐτῷ δὲ τερπνός 'His death is bitter to me as it is sweet to them, but to him it brought pleasure'. Dik (2007) 46 and 170 analyzes ἐμοὶ as topic, πικρὸς as focus, and τέθνηκεν as the verb, but one could plausibly argue that Ajax is the (understood) topic, ἐμοὶ contrastive focus, and πικρὸς a second contrastive (and informative) focus.⁵²

⁴⁸ Fraser (2001) 33–34.

⁴⁹ See Goldstein (2008); Battezzato (2000) 148–156 = (2008) 88–96, arguing for some cases of sentence-final focus: see the counter-arguments in Dik (2007) 157–166. See also Devine/Stephens (2000) 97–103.

⁵⁰ Note Dik (2007) 54–56 and 170; the interpretation of some examples (e.g. p. 55n21) is dubious; moreover, the pragmatic context of *Ant.* 1282 appears to be identical to that of *El.* 673 but the word order is different. The prosodic weight of the words involved may be a factor.

⁵¹ See e.g. Dik (2007) 33–34.

⁵² For multiple foci, see Dik (2007) 60–63, 70–71 (note esp. Aesch. *Ag.* 1318–1319), 129 (questions with multiple interrogatives), 135–136; Devine/Stephens (2000) *passim*.

In spite of these problems, the application of pragmatic concepts, especially topic and focus, to the study of Greek word order has provided a new and convincing interpretation of some syntactic features, as in the case of prolepsis, discussed above, questions, and hyperbaton.

In questions, as a rule, interrogative adjectives, pronouns, and adverbs come first. In a substantial number of clauses, however, a new topic or a contrastive focus takes first position, forcing the interrogative word to a later slot in the sentence. See e.g. *OT* 954, οὗτος δὲ τίς ποτ' ἐστὶ καὶ τί μοι λέγει; 'Who is he and what does he say to me?': Oedipus stresses the new topic, the messenger, and the pronoun οὗτος takes first position in the sentence.⁵³

Another area where a pragmatic approach to word order is fruitful is hyperbaton: Devine/Stephens (2000) have shown that hyperbaton (the separation of a modifier from its 'head'; e.g. the separation of an adjective from a noun) is to be explained by different degrees of focus (weak/strong focus) or by topic. See *OT* 750–751:

πότερον ἐχώρει βαιός, ἢ πολλοὺς ἔχων
ἄνδρας λοχίτας, οἱ ἄνῃρ ἀρχηγέτης;

Did he go with a small retinue, or had he many guards, in the manner of a king?

In the classification of Devine and Stephens, the phrase πολλοὺς ἔχων/ἄνδρας λοχίτας is Y1 hyperbaton: the adjective πολλούς is separated from ἄνδρας λοχίτας, and the modifier πολλούς comes before the head of the phrase. There is strong focus on the adjective: *many* guards, not a few. This explains why a phrase such as πολλοὺς ἔχων/ἄνδρας λοχίτας is paralleled in prose in e.g. *Lys.* 14.36 πολλῶν ἦρξε τριήρων.⁵⁴ As Devine/Stephens (2000) 112–113 say, in prose:

[b]asically, an adjective can only be used in Y1 hyperbaton if it has a narrow strong focus. Consequently descriptive adjectives, emphatic or otherwise, and restrictive adjectives not in strong focus never, or hardly ever, occur in Y1 hyperbaton in prose. In verse, this constraint is simply absent. Descriptively used adjectives are well attested in Y1 hyperbaton in tragedy, particularly in contexts favouring their occurrence, such as the ornamental style of lyric or the highly coloured narrative of messenger speeches.

⁵³ Dik (2007) 151. See also e.g. *OT* 108 and 128; Dik (2007) 148–149 and 136–167; Battezzato (2000) = (2008) 81–101.

⁵⁴ Devine/Stephens (2000) 47.

In tragedy we find many hyperbata such as ‘white light’ λευκὸν ... φάος (*Aj.* 707–709) and ‘white milk’ λευκὸν ... γάλα (*Soph. fr.* 648; *Eur. Bacch.* 700, *Cyc.* 389); in these cases, the hyperbaton cannot imply that the speaker chooses white milk over milk of a different colour.⁵⁵ Classical Greek poetry continues the linguistic typology of early Greek, as preserved for us (and for classical poets) in epic and archaic lyric; the archaic linguistic structure had a non-hierarchical phrase structure, abandoned in favour of much more rigid phrase structure in classical and Hellenistic Greek.⁵⁶

Finally, a pragmatic approach⁵⁷ explains a number of constructions that were traditionally classified in the category of ‘anacoluthon’ such as the pendent nominative.⁵⁸ In *OT* 159–163 we read:

Πρώτά σε κεκλόμενος, θύγατερ Διός, ἄμβροτ' Ἀθάνα,
 γαῖάοχόν τ' ἀδελφεάν
 Ἄρτεμιν, ἃ κυκλόεντ' ἀγορᾶς θρόνον εὐκλέα θάσσει,
 καὶ Φοῖβον ἐκαβόλον, ἰώ,
 τρισσοὶ ἀλεξίμοροι προφάνητέ μοι,

On you first I call, daughter of Zeus, immortal Athena, and I implore your sister who protects the land, Artemis, seated on her round throne, far-famed, in the marketplace, and Phoebus the far-darter; appear to me, all three, to ward off doom!

Here the participle κεκλόμενος is not followed by a main verb in the first person singular (note that here the exclamation ἰώ interrupts the flow of the sentence; see also *OT* 60 and 963). As Slings (1992) 100 says of *Il.* 6.510–511, ‘the Topic is put in as the provisional subject, and after the independent

⁵⁵ Devine/Stephens (2000) 113.

⁵⁶ Devine/Stephens (2000) 192 convincingly demonstrate that ‘[h]yperbaton originates in a flatter, less configurational type of syntax than that familiar to us from modern western European languages. Although Homeric syntax has developed considerably from the posited prehistoric typology, it still permits us to reconstruct’ some aspects of the original system. This stage is a nonconfigurational type of syntax. ‘The term nonconfigurational implies that the language has a rather flat (as opposed to hierarchical) phrase structure’ (Devine/Stephens 2000, 142). The properties of nonconfigurational language include free word order, null anaphora, lack of definite articles, and parataxis (see Devine/Stephens 2000, 143–148 for a survey). ‘When we compare the prehistoric nonconfigurational syntax that partly survives in Homer with the Greek of the New Testament, we observe a complete typological shift from a freely nonconfigurational to a principally configurational style of noun phrase syntax. Classical verse still preserves Y1 hyperbaton in a recognizably nonconfigurational form, whereas the more restricted usage of classical prose represents a transitional stage between the two types of syntax’ (Devine/Stephens 2000, 203).

⁵⁷ Slings (1992) 92–100.

⁵⁸ For discussions and lists of anacolutha in Sophocles, see Bruhn (1899) 103–111; Kühner/Gerth (1904) 105–108; Moorhouse (1982) 21–22.

information has been provided, the Topic is repeated in the required syntactic function, with the corresponding case. From a point of view of oral communication, if this analysis is correct, the sentence is completely well-formed'. It is noteworthy that Sophocles decides to use this syntactic feature in a choral passage, indeed at the crucial invocation to the gods in the *parodos*; what we see as syntactic looseness was perceived by the playwright not as detracting from the solemnity of the language, but as adding to its clarity. Constructions of this type are often taken as a sign of spoken, informal or careless language. Slings partly concurs, although he claims that syntactic regularity is typical of written texts, and does not apply to orally performed text, such as archaic epic.

5. *Words and Meaning: Pragmatics and Rhetoric*

Rhetoric is one of the oldest and most important branches of the study of literature, and is strictly connected with the study of language. This applies especially to the so-called figures of speech,⁵⁹ which have been the object of general surveys, as well as monographs.⁶⁰ Metaphor, in particular, has been the focus of intense study.⁶¹ Sophocles often manipulates the meaning of usual words by synecdoche or metaphor: e.g. λέχος (literally 'bed') can mean 'marriage' or even 'wife';⁶² 'wind' may indicate passionate emotions (*Ant.* 929–930);⁶³ song and music 'shine' (*OT* 186 Παῖδ' δὲ λάμπει 'Loud rings out [literally: 'shines'] the hymn to the Healer').⁶⁴ The strangeness of some metaphors is greater for us than for an audience familiar with classical poetical language. In other cases, the cumulative effect of a series of metaphors can be disconcerting, as in the case of the third *stasimon* of *Trachiniae*. The Chorus tells us that necessity stings (or anoints?) Heracles by making use of a cloud (831–833, εἰ γὰρ σφε Κενταύρου φονίᾳ νεφέλα/χρίει δολοποιὸς ἀνάγκη/πλευρά 'For if the cunning constraint of the Centaur with its deadly snare stings his sides') and ends a stanza by stating that the hero

⁵⁹ For general surveys, see e.g. Kennedy (1963) and (1994); Lausberg (1998); Ueding (1992–); Worthington (2006).

⁶⁰ See Campbell (1879) 68–87 and Bruhn (1899) 111–160 *passim*. See also e.g. Fehling (1968) and (1969); Easterling (1973); Bers (1974).

⁶¹ On ancient and modern theories, see e.g. Lakoff/Johnson (1980); Boys-Stones (2003) and Kövescses (2010²), with extensive bibliographies.

⁶² See Easterling (1982) 74–75 on *Trach.* 27–28.

⁶³ See Griffith (1999) *ad loc.* and on *Ant.* 137.

⁶⁴ Cf. Bruhn (1899) 155–156; Diggle (1994) 11–12; Mastronarde (1994) on Eur. *Phoen.* 1377.

'suffers every torture from the deadly sting caused by the cunning words of the black-haired one as it boils up' (837–840, *μελαγχχαίτα τ' / ἄμμιγά νιν αἰκίζει / φόνια δολόμου- / θα κέντρ' ἐπιζέσαντα*).⁶⁵ Given a passage such as this, we may question the statement of Slings (1997, 175) that

[a] figure of speech is a fixed strategy used for arranging information, borrowed from everyday language but employed in such a way that the competent native reader/listener will recognize it as untypical of everyday language and interpret it as literary.

These phenomena have parallels in (and might grow from) ordinary language. Slings is stressing the similarities for the sake of his argument, which risks flattening the force of the most striking poetic examples, but he is however well aware of the differences between the poetic and colloquial linguistic contexts. The cognitive usefulness of metaphor and anaphora (among other figures of speech) is in any case self-evident in phrases such as 'the wide harbour' (*OT* 1208, *μέγας λιμὴν*), the 'field your [= Oedipus] father sowed' (*OT* 1211–1212, *αἱ πατρῶαι ... ἄλοκες*, in reference to Jocasta's body), or the 'bloody dust [or 'scimitar'] of the gods below' which is 'harvesting' the 'last root of the house of Oedipus' (*Ant.* 599–603),⁶⁶ or the invocation to Eros at *Ant.* 781–782, which cannot fail to stay in the memory of audiences and readers. Deciphering the reference of an artistic representation is a pleasurable cognitive process, and Aristotle (*Poet.* 1448b12–17) considers this pleasure a decisive innate reason why people love art.

But Slings' remark is useful in that it stresses the connection between pragmatics and rhetoric. His first example of a figure of speech is precisely a *Y1* hyperbaton, where (he argues) the adjective in hyperbaton is not in strong focus, but is given as a Topic: Eur. *El.* 435–436 *ἔν' ὁ φίλαυλος ἔπαλλε δελφίς*, which he translates 'where the flute-lover, the dolphin, was playing'.⁶⁷ Slings also argues that anaphora is a chunking device frequently used in spoken language; its use in poetry is an extension of the oral usage. Both Slings (1997) and Devine/Stephens (2000) assume that the linguistic specificity of classical Greek poetry derives from an otherwise perfectly 'normal' construction. They differ in locating the origin in the contemporary spoken language (Slings) or in an archaic stage of the language, attested in poetry (Devine and Stephens). As for hyperbaton, an origin in classical spoken Attic does not work for the types *ὁ φίλαυλος ... δελφίς* or *λευκὸν ...*

⁶⁵ For various attempts at an explanation, see Jebb (1892); Easterling (1982); Davies (1991) ad loc.

⁶⁶ In favour of retaining *κόνις*, see Griffith (1999) ad loc.

⁶⁷ Slings (1997) 174.

γάλα, since we do not find these constructions in the orators or in Plato; Slings himself claims that that 'one possible reconstruction of the audience's response might be that the clause is reminiscent of Aeschylus's kennings, with the solution at the end' (1997, 174). The hyperbaton is so common in lyric (e.g. in Pindar: *Ol.* 13.84–85 ὁ καρτερὸς ὁρμαίνων ἔλε Βελλεροφόντας) that a specific reference to Aeschylus is unlikely.

6. *Words and Speakers (2): Politeness Theory*

A final area related to pragmatics of special interest for the study of Sophoclean language is politeness theory. Politeness theory is a large field of linguistic research.⁶⁸ The seminal work of Brown/Levinson (1987) has advanced the concept of 'face' (as in 'losing face'): 'positive face' 'is the want to be approved of or admired' while 'negative face' 'is the want not to be imposed upon or impeded'.⁶⁹ Speakers intending to be polite normally avoid 'face-threatening acts', or try to minimize the 'threat', e.g. by choosing an indirect formulation of an order (which would threaten the 'negative face' of the addressee) or toning down criticisms (which poses a threat to the 'positive face' of the addressee).

This set of conceptual tools is especially useful for understanding the pleonastic or elliptical nature of some tragic dialogues. Saying more or less than is required are typical polite strategies.⁷⁰ This helps make sense of the exchange between Oedipus and Creon:

- 85 (OI.) ἀναξ, ἐμόν κήδευμα, παῖ Μεινικέως,
 τίν' ἡμῖν ἡκεις τοῦ θεοῦ φήμην φέρων;
 (KP.) ἐσθλὴν· λέγω γὰρ καὶ τὰ δύσφορ', εἰ τύχοι
 κατ' ὀρθὸν ἐξελθόντα, πάντ' ἂν εὐτυχεῖν.
 (OI.) ἔστιν δὲ ποῖον τοῦπος; οὔτε γὰρ θρασὺς
 90 οὔτ' οὖν προδείσας εἰμὶ τῷ γε νῦν λόγῳ.

⁶⁸ See e.g. Levinson (1983); Brown/Levinson (1987); Watts (2003); Watts/Ide/Ehlich (2005); Horn (2004), with bibliography. On classical texts, see e.g. Braun (2006) and Hall (2009), with references.

⁶⁹ Lloyd (2006) 226, paraphrasing Brown/Levinson (1987).

⁷⁰ The theory of Brown and Levinson is based on Grice's maxims of conversation. Grice argued that conversation must follow four rules: 'relevance (be relevant); quantity (say no more or less than is required), quality (be truthful, sincere), and manner (be perspicuous, avoid ambiguity and obscurity)' (Lloyd 2006, 226: see Grice 1989, 22–40). This explains why a 'bald-on-record utterance would frequently be face-threatening' (Lloyd 2006, 226). Another politeness strategy is 'going off record', that is, choosing a phrasing that is open to 'a number of defensible interpretations' (Brown/Levinson 1987, 211; Lloyd 2006, 235–238, discussing Soph. *El.* 1098–1102).

(OEDIPUS) Lord, kinsman, son of Menoeceus, what word of the god have you come to bring us?

(CREON) One that is good; I say that even troubles hard to bear, if they chance to turn out well, can bring good fortune.

(OEDIPUS) But what is the message? What you are now saying makes me neither confident nor apprehensive.

Dawe (2006) on *OT* 89–90 describes Creon's first answer (*OT* 87–88) as two lines of 'bland and unhelpful superficiality'. In fact, the extreme formality of this exchange is a clue to the underlying tension:⁷¹ each speaker is careful to avoid face-threatening actions. Both Creon and Oedipus are at the top of the social hierarchy and they are performing their dialogue in front of the citizen body, at a crucial time for the town. Losing face, or causing the other person to lose face, would be ruinous for their position. Oedipus softens his question by adding an extended and affectionate address (85), and avoids using an imperative. Creon's reply is guarded and open to different interpretations. He is also trying to soften the threat to the negative face of Oedipus: besides the piece of unpleasant news, Creon must *order* Oedipus to issue a ban against the killer of Laius. Oedipus avoids saying that he is unsatisfied with Creon's answer, and is so indirect that he phrases his sentence as a double litotes ('neither confident nor apprehensive'). This level of politeness is completely abandoned in the violent exchange of the second episode (*OT* 513–630), where Oedipus accuses Creon of plotting against his rule.

The roles are completely reversed yet again in the final scene of the drama, when Oedipus sabotages his own positive face by confessing his guilt to the Chorus (1296–1415). However, even in these extreme circumstances, he finds a way to reinforce his 'positive face' by stressing his unique ability to bear suffering: τὰ μὰ γὰρ κακὰ/οὐδείς οἶός τε πλὴν ἐμοῦ φέρειν βροτῶν 'for there is no human being who can bear my woes but I' (*OT* 1414–1415). Creon arrives again, in a mirror-reversal of the earlier scene. Astonishingly, Oedipus worries about etiquette, expressing embarrassment not for the disaster he brought to the *polis* and the family, but for their previous quarrel (*OT* 1419–1423):

(OI.) οἴμοι, τί δῆτα λέξομεν πρὸς τόνδ' ἔπος;
τίς μοι φανεῖται πίστις ἔνδικος; τὰ γὰρ
πάρος πρὸς αὐτὸν πάντ' ἐφηύρημαι κακός.

⁷¹ Note that Jebb (1893) on *OT* 87–88 was aware of the problems of etiquette: 'Creon, unwilling to speak plainly before the chorus, hints to Oedipus that he brings a clue to the means by which the anger of heaven may be appeased'.

(KP.) οὐχ ὥς γελαστής, Οἰδίπους, ἐλήλυθα,
οὔδ' ὥς ὀνειδιῶν τι τῶν πάρος κακῶν.

(OEDIPUS) Alas, what words can I address to him? What just claims to confidence shall I produce? For in all my past dealings with him I am found to have done wrong.

(CREON) I have not come to mock you, Oedipus, or to reproach you with any wrong that lies in the past.

This concern is a sign of Oedipus' intellectual self-control: he wants to manipulate Creon yet again, but now Creon has all the power. Oedipus then takes an unusual gambit: formally, he speaks to the Chorus, but in fact he wants Creon to hear him. Only because Oedipus pretends to speak to the Chorus can his apology be felt to be sincere; and this is one of the rare cases where a character entering the scene is in verbal contact with the character onstage.⁷² Creon cannot but accept this indirect apology, and diffuses any sense of prejudiced hostility. This gives Oedipus room for affectionate appeals which pander to Creon's 'positive face' (e.g. 1433 ἄριστος, 1468–1475), and for apologetic attacks against Oedipus' own (1433, πρὸς κάκιστον ἄνδρ' ἐμέ): Oedipus thus manages to obtain from Creon at least one of his goals, that is, physical contact with his daughters. Creon's occasional rudeness is not due to careless characterization,⁷³ but is rather a sign of the reversal of status and power (see *OT* 1442–1445).

Politeness (as well as impoliteness)⁷⁴ is a crucial element in Sophocles' tragedies, which often focus on contested but not illegitimate authority: Creon in *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Odysseus in *Philoctetes* and, with Agamemnon, in *Ajax*, are faced with heavy criticism; the *Oedipus at Colonus* is an exercise in the balancing of moral and political authority.

Related to politeness theory is the field of sociolinguistics, that is, the study of how speakers of different genders and social classes use language. It is very likely that in actual spoken classical Greek, even among people living in Attica, sociolinguistic differences would be apparent in phonetics, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary: see especially Willi (2003) and, for dialect

⁷² 'The convention is ... that the comments which follow announcement or summons are uttered out of contact with the character in the doorway' (Mastronarde 1979, 28) in the case of entrances from the *skene*: see e.g. Soph. *Trach.* 594–597; Taplin (1977) 72–73; Poe (1992) 121 and 131–135. The convention applies even more strongly if Creon is coming from the *parodos*: see Mastronarde (1979) 20–21; Poe (1992) 125–126n15; Soph. *El.* 1428–1442. Hamilton (1978) 75 classifies Creon's entrance as an entrance from the *skene*.

⁷³ As Dawe (2006) 194 on *OT* 1445 claims. I do not accept his argument that *OT* 1424–1530 is a spurious ending: see Finglass (2009a).

⁷⁴ On the language of violence, see e.g. Schein (2002).

variations, Colvin (1999). In tragedy, speakers are not differentiated by phonetics and dialectal variants;⁷⁵ some variants in morphology, syntax, vocabulary, and speech genres (e.g. language of lament and prayer, especially in the case of female language) can be detected,⁷⁶ but systematic general studies are lacking.⁷⁷

7. *The Language of Homer and the Language of Oedipus*

In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, characters and Chorus fight over who is to interpret the language of oracles, and how.⁷⁸ Oracles are by nature ambiguous: any small mistake in reporting or interpreting them can be crucial. Oedipus is famous precisely for solving difficult riddles, as he himself remarks in the play (440–443). It was Oedipus, not Teiresias, who solved the riddle of the ‘harsh singer’ (36), of the ‘rhapsodic bitch’ (391), the Sphinx.⁷⁹ Oedipus is confident in his ability as interpreter, and diffident about other people’s interpretations (especially those of Teiresias and Creon). He trusts his ability to understand what Apollo tells him about his fate. The oracle had said (*OT* 791–793), in his own report:

ὥς μητρὶ μὲν χρεῖν με μειχθῆναι, γένος δ’
ἄτλητον ἀνθρώποισι δηλώσοιμ’ ὄραν,
φονεὺς δ’ ἐσοίμην τοῦ φυτεύσαντος πατρός.

that I was destined to lie with my mother, and to show to mortals a brood they could not bear to look upon, and that I should be the murderer of the father who had begotten me.

Oedipus gives an abstract of the oracle in iambic trimeters. He characteristically uses tragic idioms and phrases. The crucial point is the phrase τοῦ φυτεύσαντος πατρός ‘the father who had begotten me’. At first sight this is yet another instance of ‘pleonasm’, a very common rhetorical figure in

⁷⁵ See e.g. Garvie (1986) on Aesch. *Cho.* 563–564.

⁷⁶ See e.g. Griffith (1999) on *Ant.* 223–331, 264–267, 407–440 (the Guard). Dickey (1996) is an excellent study of forms of address, with special attention to sociolinguistics. On the language of women, see Sommerstein (2009) 15–42; MacClure (1999) (tragedy in general); Mossman (2001) (on Euripides); Fögen (2010) (in general).

⁷⁷ See Willi (2010) on register variations in Greek in general, and Collard (2005) 357–360 on tragedy.

⁷⁸ For a fuller exposition of the argument discussed in this section, see Battezzato (2008) 1–11.

⁷⁹ On ‘rhapsode’, see Graziosi (2002) 25 and 29. On hexameter and oracles, see Eur. fr. 540a.5–6 Kannicht; Hdt. 1.47, 1.62, 7.220.

tragedy: the use of more words that are needed to signify the meaning. The phrase ‘the father who had begotten me’ and similar ones occur in a number of plays.⁸⁰ In fact, this is not an instance of *rhetorical* abundance. Apollo tries to make the point that Oedipus should look for ‘the father who *generated* you’. In linguistic terms, the *focus* is on the addition—in the correct interpretation of the sentence. Oedipus, in assuming that φυτεύσαντος is a pleonasm, as it generally is in the tragic language, makes a crucial mistake in interpretation. Later in the same scene, he paraphrases (again) the words of Apollo. Oedipus complains that, if he is found guilty of the murder of Laius, he cannot go back to his ‘fatherland’ (*OT* 823–827):

ἀρ' οὐχὶ πᾶς ἀναγνος; εἴ με χρὴ φυγεῖν,
καί μοι φυγόντι μήστι τοὺς ἐμούς ἰδεῖν
μήτ' ἐμβατεῦσαι πατρίδος, ἣ γάμοις με δεῖ
μητρὸς ζυγῆναι καὶ πατέρα κατακτανεῖν
Πόλυβον, ὃς ἐξέθρεψε καὶ ἐφύσε μέ.

am I not altogether unholy, if I must leave my country, and in my exile never see my dear ones, nor set foot upon my fatherland, or else I would be joined in marriage with my mother and would slay my father Polybus, he who brought me up, he who begot me.

ἐξέθρεψε καὶ ἐφύσε P.Oxy 1369, HNOVZr: ἐξέφυσε καὶ ἐθρεψέ ACDFGLPPaRTXrXs⁸¹

Here Oedipus adopts a Homeric phrase, a phrase imitated in tragedy a number of times.⁸² Ancient scholars called this rhetorical figure *hysterologia* or *prothysteron*, or also *hysteron proteron*. The language of Homer does not necessarily imply that co-ordinated verbs are listed in chronological order: the semantics of the verbs is enough to clarify their temporal relationship, whereas we would use a past perfect tense or some other time marker. The Homeric *hysteron proteron* emphasizes the first element of the series; the second element is something that is subordinated, and, from a logical point of view, descends from the first one.⁸³

⁸⁰ Aesch. *Supp.* 592; Soph. *Aj.* 1296 ὁ φυτύσας πατήρ, *El.* 1412 ὁ γεννήσας πατήρ ‘the father that generated him’, *OT* 1482 τοῦ φυτουργοῦ πατρός, *OT* 1514 τοῦ φυτεύσαντος πατρός, *Trach.* 311 ὁ φυτύσας πατήρ; Eur. *Alc.* 1137. See already *Il.* 24.562 μήτηρ, ἥ μ' ἔτεκεν.

⁸¹ The minority reading, supported by the papyrus, is rhetorically more complex, and is far more likely to have been corrupted into the ‘chronological’ order, than the reverse, *pace* Dawe (1982) and others. See Ferrari (1983) 35; Renehan (1992) 336–337. Lloyd-Jones (1994a) and Dawe (2006) correctly print the papyrus order.

⁸² See e.g. *Il.* 1.251 τράφεν ἥδ' ἐγένοντο, *Od.* 4.723, 10.417, 12.134, 14. 201; Eur. *Hec.* 762, *Supp.* 919, *El.* 969.

⁸³ See Battezzato (2008) 14–51, (2003c).

Oedipus is equating the 'tragic' phrase 'the father that begot me' with the epic phrase 'he brought me up and generated me'. When he slips into an epic formulaic expression, he takes for granted precisely what is to be demonstrated: that the 'father who brought him up' is also 'the father that generated him'.⁸⁴ Oedipus is tricked by poetical language. He assumes that the epic formula is the same as the oracular phrase. His Homeric allusion is at the same time a demonstration of his skill as a producer of texts, and of his failure as an interpreter.⁸⁵

Oedipus alludes to Homer on another occasion in the play. He claims to be innocent of the death of his 'father' Polybus, 'unless he died [κατέφθιθ'] from missing me [τῶμῳ πόθῳ]; in that way I might have caused his death' (*OT* 969–970). This is a clear allusion to the *Odyssey*.⁸⁶ The mother of Odysseus died, she claims, precisely because she missed him (*Od.* 11.202–203): 'but the fact that I missed you [σός ... πόθοος], and your clever thoughts, o splendid Odysseus, and your kindness took away my life from me, the life that is as sweet as honey'. In the *Odyssey* there is someone else who almost dies of longing for Odysseus: his wife Penelope. She desires to die (*Od.* 18.203–205) 'right away, now, so that I will not consume [φθινύθῳ] my life any more in grief, missing [ποθέουσα] all the good qualities of my husband'.⁸⁷ Notice that in *Oedipus Tyrannus* the verb κατέφθιθ', 'he died', recalls φθινύθῳ from the Penelope passage, which is crucial. Oedipus, by alluding to Homer, manages to merge into one phrase an allusion to 'mother' and 'wife'—the very merging the oracle talks about.

Oedipus did not pay enough attention to the meaning hidden in his own language and in his Homeric allusions.⁸⁸ This is why we are surprised when, at the end, he claims that 'all is now clear' (1182, σαφῆ); not only that, but, specifically, that *Apollo's* pronouncement is all too clear, 'that I, the parricide, the impious one, should be allowed to perish!' (1440–1441). When Creon returned from Delphi, he said that Apollo had given his order 'clearly' (96, ἐμφανῶς). Oedipus, on the other hand, had insisted that it was

⁸⁴ Oedipus was more careful in his dialogue with Teiresias (435–436) and later paraphrase of the oracle (994–996). Note also the stress on 'generation' in lines 1007, 1012, 1015, 1017.

⁸⁵ The difficulty for Oedipus is compounded by the fact that, in tragic language, 'the passive of τρέφω comes close to the meaning 'be born': Renahan (1992) 361, commenting on *OT* 1380. See e.g. Jebb (1898) on *Phil.* 3, and *Aj.* 556–557, 1229, *OT* 1123, *Eur. Ion* 692–693.

⁸⁶ See e.g. Jebb (1893) and Dawe (2006) ad loc.

⁸⁷ See also *Od.* 19.136 (Penelope) and 14.144 (Eumeus).

⁸⁸ On the interpretation of Homer in the fifth century, see West (2001) 23–28; Graziosi (2001) and, with special attention to hidden allusions, Richardson (1973).

up to him to 'make clear' (132, ἐγὼ φανῶ) the matter: Apollo's indications were not enough. The positions of Oedipus and Creon are reversed at the end: Oedipus now claims that everything is clear—and he would like to find a way to 'block the stream of hearing though his ears' so as to shut himself off from the excessive clarity—he understood too much. On the contrary, Creon finds that he needs further assistance and explanation from the oracle

At the end, Creon has to take upon himself the duty of interpreting the oracle. The fight over its interpretation is over. The play has taught Creon that oracles are trustworthy, but opaque to interpretation: the representative of the community, Creon, lacks the confidence to believe in the 'clarity' of the oracles they have fought to control. More cautious than Oedipus, he appreciates the dangers and the obscurities of language, which is a lesson for interpreters and readers of the language of Sophocles as well.

OEDIPUS, ODYSSEUS, AND THE FAILURE OF RHETORIC

Nancy Worman

Τραγούδησε μικρή Ἀντιγόνη, τραγούδησε, τραγούδησε ...
δὲ σοῦ μιλῶ γιὰ περασμένα, μιλῶ γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη·
στόλισε τὰ μαλλιά σου μὲ τ' ἀγκάθια τοῦ ἥλιου,
σκοτεινὴ κοπέλλα·

Sing, little Antigone, sing, sing
I do not speak of the past, I speak of love;
Crown your hair with thorns of the sun, dark girl.

G. Seferis, 'Thrush'

Tragic heroes on the ancient Athenian stage often explain, exhort, remonstrate, and lyricize, but tragedy does not stage many successful scenes of persuasion. In Sophocles' plays in particular, neither song nor love offers solution or redemption; and heroes are trapped in fences of their own making. These heroes are also tyrannical, sometimes literally kings, but almost always drastically uncompromising and undemocratic. The impasses these dynamics create may even be structurally necessary to the tragic plot, marked out as it is among divergent viewpoints, the tragic crisis pegged strenuously to the impossibility of resolving them one with another. At times the dramatic staging that the texts indicate also map this isolation and impasse, so that heroes may appear uniquely solitary, unreachable, and intransigent.

Why, then, would Sophocles, or any tragic poet for that matter, offer examples of persuasive argument, compromise, and/or successful connection, if this failure is often the central catastrophe dramatized? Sophocles seems to have been particularly interested in heroes at odds with the social group—most famously Antigone, whose stringent views on family rather than community loyalty lead to her death. We might also recognize a similar perspectival isolation in Ajax, the maddened and then inflexible suicide; or Electra, who stalwartly refuses to move or to shut up. Oedipus also treads humanity's margins, high and low. His extreme elevation at the outset of *Oedipus Tyrannus* leads the citizens to associate him with the lesser gods (*daimones*); and he leaves the stage as a blind and bloody scapegoat

at the play's end, a status reiterated with different emphases in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Philoctetes spends much of his time onstage screaming in pain from the pulsing of his wound, or expostulating emotionally alone and with others. All of these characters dramatize in their various ways breakdowns in communication, and the difficulties of conflict resolution by means of speechifying.

But *Philoctetes* also showcases Odysseus as stage manager and master plotter.¹ In Sophocles' plays, if not in tragedy more generally, only the profoundly strategic Odysseus offers audiences any sustained view of the potential harms and benefits of persuasive rhetoric. Even though he is merely temporarily successful in persuading Neoptolemus to deceive Philoctetes into giving up his famous bow, the drama exposes the brutal necessities of wartime choices and deploys Odysseus as a clever and oratorically adept tactician. In *Ajax*, by contrast, while the hero views Odysseus as a crafty deceiver, Odysseus behaves in a distinctly thoughtful and fair-minded manner, pitying the beleaguered Ajax and using his persuasive skills to preserve an honourable burial for him.

In fifth-century drama Odysseus is not exactly a good man, but he is a wise and practical one. And while his reputation suffers quite generally on the Athenian stage, Sophocles may be unique in highlighting in his character both the positive and the negative aspects of persuasive, strategic modes. In Sophocles' corpus, most of which is lost, fragments indicate that Odysseus was a familiar presence in his dramas, likely more so than any other character from Greek mythohistory. At least eleven plays (out of a total of 120) either feature him or include him crucially in the action.² Of these, five definitely or probably place Odysseus in the role of politician and henchman to the Greek leaders (*Ajax*, *Philoctetes*, *Philoctetes at Troy*, *Scyrians*, and *Teucer*), while at least three highlight the strategic and sometimes deceptive aspects of his rhetorical capabilities (*Palamedes*, *Philoctetes*, *Teucer*). The composite portrait that emerges from these plays indicates a hero uniquely poised to orchestrate political (and by extension dramatic) plots, an often unscrupulous but always *deinos* (i.e. 'dauntingly clever') manipulator of circumstances and emotions.

¹ See Worman (1999), (2000).

² Counting the extant *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, as well as *Euryalus*, *Nausicaa*, *Niptra*, *Odysseus Acanthoplex* ('Struck by a Fishhook'), *Odysseus Maddened*, *Palamedes*, *Philoctetes at Troy*, *Scyrians*, and *Teucer*. See Sutton (1984) on what can be gleaned from fragments and synopses.

Of the extant plays, the only other sustained window on the power of persuasion in one setting is Sophocles' late play *Oedipus at Colonus*, in which the ragged hero emerges as a powerful oratorical presence and his stronger-willed daughter follows him in a more limited manner. In this case, although Oedipus is neither unscrupulous nor deceptive, he does accuse a calculating Creon of being both, so that the drama as a whole encompasses rhetorical interaction in its positive and negative aspects.³ Both Odysseus and Oedipus play politicians in various guises—that is, they tend to be at core both threats to community welfare and cohesion and deeply implicated in these. Interestingly for this analysis, Odysseus and Oedipus appear to share other traits as well. Although Odysseus is not a particularly tragic character, if one focuses in—as Sophocles does at least twice—on the murderous relationship he has with his two illegitimate sons, violent, incestuous patterns emerge that are reminiscent of Oedipus' familial mire. Two plays in particular, *Euryalus* and *Odysseus Acanthoplex*, offer another side of Odysseus: that of the philandering adventurer, who fathers children as he goes. These children are caught, like Oedipus, in their ignorance; and they inadvertently either intend or achieve violent ends for their father. In the one play *Euryalus*, son by Odysseus of the Epirian Euippe, plots to kill a man he does not know is his father; in the other *Telegonus* achieves this unintentionally with a poisoned fishhook. Further, in the latter play, both sons are then ordered by Athena to marry their stepmothers (i.e. *Telegonus*, Penelope and Telemachus, Circe). It would appear from these two exceptionally clever characters that, as Nietzsche famously claimed of Oedipus, wisdom necessarily carries with it (other) transgressions against nature.⁴ We might add that in Greek tragedy, as well as some other classical performance settings, oratorical skills, insofar as they are seductive, deceptive, and therefore dangerously distracting, are always hedged around by the potential for delusion, erotic contraventions, and violence.

In the sections that follow I investigate persuasive modes briefly in the fifth-century setting and in more detail in Sophocles. *Antigone*, Creon, and Oedipus serve as Odysseus' foils, insofar as these dangerously recalcitrant but clever and articulate characters diverge in distinctive ways from the Odyssean model. Oedipus, not surprisingly, offers the greatest challenge to an appreciation of Odysseus' strategic skills as providing the only way

³ See further discussion below.

⁴ Nietzsche [1872] (1967) 68–69 (section 9).

forward, since after his blinding Oedipus' intelligence combines with a touching debility and on the strength of both he forges bonds that are anathema to the wily politician. When perspectives clash and communication stalls, only the broad-minded, changeable views of politicians such as Odysseus—or, possibly, the blind outcast's need for human connection—can make any headway toward compromise and concord. That said, within the tragic framework Odysseus remains a singular type. If his elasticity and practicality renders him uniquely untragic, that may be Sophocles' point. Democratic wrangling, messy and ignoble as it often is, contrasts sharply with the autocratic and inflexible perspectives of tragic heroes, who stand on principle and die just there, upright and alone.

1. *Drama and Oratory in Athens*

Two things happened to ideas about and techniques of persuasion in the second half of the fifth century in Athens: arenas for public speaking emerged as central to the running of the democracy (most crucially the Council, the Assembly, and the law courts); and the developing study of strategies for successfully persuading a large crowd (200–500 in the courts, 500 in the Council, and thousands in the Assembly) produced a set of dominant ideas about the divergence of rhetorical skills and the civic good. 'Rhetoric', or eloquence and its study or critique, comprises all kinds of persuasive modes and scenarios, including those in literary settings and those practiced at in set speeches.⁵ Rhetorical theorists, many of them like Gorgias and Protagoras known by the usually derogatory label 'sophists', claimed to be able to teach skills that seem to have reached well beyond what moderns might conceive as oratorical tactics, including analysis of poetry, philosophical questions, and characterological investigations.⁶ 'Oratory', or public speaking, designates most particularly the performative act itself, in this case the practice of persuasion in large, open-air democratic arenas for policy setting and decision making. Famous orators such as Pericles and Cleon, as well versed as they appear to have been in the art of public speaking, were teachers only by example.

⁵ See, e.g., Kennedy (1963), (1994); Cole (1991); Enos (1993); Poulakos (1995); Schiappa (1999); Usher (1999).

⁶ See, e.g., the fragments of Gorgias; also Plato's *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*. See Guthrie (1971); Kerferd (1981).

The dramatic genres developed in parallel open-air, mixed-use settings playing to large audiences. As a central instance, the Theatre of Dionysus housed the performance of tragedies and some comedies within a larger festival, which also included semi-political rituals like the parading of generals and war orphans and the display of tributes.⁷ The theatre could hold upwards of 20,000 people. Other demes around Attica had smaller, mixed-use theatres (e.g. Euonymon, Thorikos); and some comedies were performed in the Lenaeon theatre, which was also likely smaller and situated somewhere south of the city walls.⁸ I emphasize the similarity and intermingling of ritual poetic and political practices because I think it essential to understand that the dramatic genres intersected with rhetoric and oratory in a number of concrete ways. Thus persuasive strategies did not represent novelties embedded in otherwise synthetic poetic practices, so much as constitute a central and indeed crucial aspect of verbal interaction in settings in which politics and poetry came together.

In fact, we might recognize in tragic poets' consistent staging of dramatic *agônes*—oratorical contests that pit two opponents against each other as if in a law court or Assembly debate—an alternative venue in which to debate in an allegorical and more abstract register the central concerns of the day. Aeschylus' *Eumenides* is perhaps the clearest extant example of this; but when, for instance, Sophocles gives characters in his Theban plays repeated criticisms of Creon's despotic, overbold speech, it is hard not to see a repeated warning to Athenian leaders about sustaining an open, flexible attitude toward civic discussion and debate. Scholars have made much of the political contexts for drama in the past twenty years, and although they have advanced our understanding of this intersection considerably, I do not mean here to suggest that these plays can be reduced to their political or even civic registers. Rather, when focusing in on the rhetorical, oratorical, or more generally persuasive practices of Sophoclean tragedy, it seems important to emphasize that these tactics are being engaged simultaneously by influential teachers and powerful generals going about the business of shaping civic and military policy in a time of imperial expansion and eventually war.⁹

⁷ See Rehm (2002) ch. 1 on the interaction of politics and religious/poetic ritual in the festivals and particularly the Theatre of Dionysus; also Pickard-Cambridge (1946) for general background.

⁸ The location is disputed; see Slater (1986). On deme theatres, see Wiles (1997); Paga (2010), who usefully cites Thuc. 8.93 for evidence of the multiple functions of these theatres.

⁹ Sophocles produced plays from the 460s until his death in 406 (with the OC produced

That said, it is difficult to peg Sophocles' extant plays to specific political events and concerns, since, for instance, the Theban plays likely span forty eventful years in Athenian history. In fact, most dates for these dramas (and a fraction of those that exist in fragments) can be only vaguely estimated. *Ajax* may be the earliest existing drama, produced, as perhaps was *Antigone*, in the 440s; *Oedipus Tyrannus* is usually placed after 430, with *Trachiniae* in the next decade; debate continues as to whether Sophocles' *Electra* was produced before or after Euripides' (in 413). This leaves two dramas for which we do know dates: *Philoctetes* (408) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (posthumously produced in 401). Of the plays involving Odysseus, *Niptra* and *Nausicaa* are likely quite early (450s–440s) and *Odysseus Acanthoplex* quite late.¹⁰ Thus speculations about the particular politics shaping a given play tend to be more deeply vexed than they are for interpreting the plays of other dramatists, since not only do the highly sophisticated aesthetics of tragedy stand in the way, but also sheer chronology.

One further point about Sophocles' extant plays should contribute to a clearer understanding of the ways in which this dramatist, in some contrast to his peers, made use of rhetorical dynamics to dramatize different types of heroic isolation. Rather than building up to a central *agôn*, as do many of Euripides' dramas, Sophocles' heroes either contend repeatedly with opponents in stichomythia (line-by-line exchanges) or paired speeches, so that their perspectives are continuously set off from those of others and their various rigidities are dramatized (especially *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus* in *OC*); or they make speeches effectively to everyone and no one in a deliberative vacuum (especially *Ajax* and *Oedipus* in *OT*). Both patterns highlight the heroes' undemocratic attitudes: either they debate impatiently and without any real sense of the potential efficacy of an exchange of views, or they give the long speeches which citizens of the latter half of the fifth century would have at least heard criticized as a mode more authoritarian than democratic, and which Odysseus explicitly rejects in *Philoctetes* (12–14). *Antigone* complicates this pattern somewhat, since the role of the rigid hero is divided between the young female rebel and the older male regent. That said, from the perspective of rhetorical dynamics, Creon rather than

by his son in 401), during which time Athens was expanding its maritime power and then, after 431, engaged in a war with the Spartans and their allies that was waged in many theatres on sea and land, until Athens' surrender in 404.

¹⁰ See Sutton (1984); the darker and more political Odysseus plays seem to belong to later dates, which conforms to the growing negative critique of his character in the later part of the fifth century. See Worman (2002).

Antigone emerges as the pivotal character, since it is he who repeatedly beats back attempts to soften his domineering resolve. As noted above, the blind Oedipus is something of an exception to this pattern; I take this up further below.

2. *Antigone, Creon, and the Locked Tongue*

Antigone dramatizes with a bleak gravity the impossibility of concord and open exchange in a city taut with violence. Thebes has been at war with Argos, whose warriors entered into an allegiance with Polyneices, contender for the throne with his brother Eteocles. Both brothers are now dead, and their uncle Creon rules the city with a tense and increasingly desperate hand. Warring cities, one in the Boeotian mainland and the other in the Peloponnese: this alone would likely appear familiar to a contemporary audience, since hostilities among the city-states did not arise suddenly in 431 (i.e. the outset of the Peloponnesian War). No character in the play speaks without consequence, and the modes themselves—as so often in tragedy but here with an especially ugly force—are set in stringent opposition to one another.

The most dominant orchestrator of this dynamic is, unsurprisingly, the haughty Creon, who scorns the speech of others as feminized, clever, or profiteering chatter. The myopia of kingship fosters his style of speaking—autocratic, inflexible, and self-righteously full of political commonplaces. Creon's decree, which he himself thinks bold and stately, mandates the mistreatment of Polyneices' corpse and leads to disaster. Fear fosters another style: since anyone who opposes Creon suffers his abuse as a weak or mercenary speaker, rumour runs rampant and most of his interlocutors equivocate. Creon's conflict with Antigone delineates a third: that of the solitary hero, who is as inflexible and principled as the king, but whose speech is marked by a startling and bold lucidity. Further, Creon's confrontations with his son Haemon and the seer Teiresias reveal a situation in which misguided rigid speech chokes off civic dialogue. As I have discussed in another setting, Creon's harsh decree regarding Polyneices' corpse results in gruesome carrion feeding, which gluts the throats of the birds of prey, so that they are unable to cry out (i.e. to signify properly) to the seer. The ominous pairing of throats choked with gore and speech that is boastful and uncompromising suggests that tyrannical talk leads to violent strife and civic miasma.¹¹

¹¹ See Worman (2008) 55–60.

When Creon enters the action, he announces his intentions to the citizens in language hedged around by political emphases, familiar images, and a preponderance of self-references.¹² He begins with a 'ship of state' metaphor that verges on a literary-political cliché,¹³ and underscores the Theban elders' loyalty during the series of kingly misfortunes that led to his reign. He then proposes a striking characterological claim: that one cannot know a man's 'soul, purpose, or judgment' (ψυχὴν τε καὶ φρόνημα καὶ γνῶμην) before he has been tested like a coin (lit. 'rubbed', ἐντριβής) by his management of rule and the laws (175–177). The touchstone or coinage metaphor is another near-cliché, but the notion that true knowledge of the individual comes from political rather than personal aims and choices crystallizes early on Creon's attachment to sovereignty.

This attachment fosters a bold disdain for dilemmas that hinge on conflicts between the city-state (*polis*) and familial loyalties. He declares abhorrent to him anyone who does not seize upon the best counsels but instead 'keeps a lock on his tongue out of fear' (ἐκ φόβου του γλῶσσαν ἐγκλήσας ἔχει, 180). He then gives his ill-fated order: that the body of Polyneices be left unburied, to be fed upon by birds and dogs (205–206). As the violence of this decree portends, Creon subsequently faces a number of abrasive encounters, in which he is rankled by and insults those who by admonitions or their own actions call attention to the dangers of inflexible, arrogant attitudes. When, most dramatically, he confronts the disobedient Antigone, she offers a concise, assertive account of a worldview opposite to his own, which urges obedience to the gods and thus to family bonds (*philia*) (450–470). Creon warns her that those who are 'too rigid in purpose' (τὰ σκλήρ' ἄγαν φρονήματα) fall farthest, and threatens her by analogies to iron and to hot-tempered horses in need of the bit (473–478). He also accuses her of boasting (ὑβρίζειν, 480; ἐπαυχεῖν, 482) about what she has done, even though he shares her bold and inflexible attitude.¹⁴ In response, Antigone declares that others would approve her actions if their tongues were not 'locked in fear' (εἰ μὴ γλῶσσαν ἐγκλήροι φόβος, 505; cf. 509). This, she says, is the happy lot of the tyrant (τυραννίς): that he can do and say what he likes (506–507). This ironic claim and their sharing of the 'locked tongue' metaphor reveal the problem with speech in the tyrannized city. The autocratic ruler's decree

¹² See Griffith (2001).

¹³ The image is familiar from lyric poetry, especially Alcaeus.

¹⁴ See Griffith (2001) on Antigone's attitude and speaking style; cf. also Foley (1996); and McClure (1999) for the larger context.

has forged a mandate for those who would oppose it: shut up or stand up, express an opposing view and die.¹⁵

Creon's son Haemon mediates this terrible choice in a crucial way, by offering the best defence in the play of a more flexible, 'democratic' approach to conflict. Haemon is himself quite the reverse of the bold speaker. A master of equivocation, throughout his exchange with Creon he seeks a way to communicate his horror at his father's brutal intentions without openly defying him. While Creon tries to pre-empt his son's resistance to the killing of his future bride by stressing filial loyalty and revealing further his own sinister misogyny, Haemon seeks a civic-minded ventriloquism with which to offer his critique. Although he cannot deny that Creon 'says these things in an upright manner' (λέγεις ὀρθῶς τάδε, 685), some other may do so. He emphasizes the fear that grips those who would oppose the king (690), but warns his father that 'dark rumour' (ἐρεμνὴ ... φάτις, 700) indicates that the city grieves for Antigone and thinks her of all women most wronged. For not deserting her fallen brother to the birds and dogs she deserves instead, rumour says, a golden prize (692–700). Haemon thus substitutes *oratio obliqua* for his own direct opposition.¹⁶ He also resorts to filial pieties and generalizations, and in the guise of the caring son counsels Creon against trusting only in his own speech or resolve, a position he represents as empty tyranny. Finally, he offers a few familiar metaphors to underscore the dangers of political inflexibility: trees that do not bend in a storm and are thus uprooted, and the ship that does not slacken its sails and ends up with its keel on top (712–717). This is the style of the rhetor with some bend himself: indirect, elastic, and ventriloquizing. While both the rigid regent and his flexible son make use of generalizations and common metaphors, only those of the latter promote the broader view.

Creon regards such speech as indicative of a feminized attitude, as if the very notion of bending were female or soft.¹⁷ Boldness, in contrast, is manly: earlier Creon declares angrily that Antigone must be the man rather

¹⁵ Cf. Electra, who is stubborn in her grieving, unwavering in her hatred of her mother, and dismissive of her sister's cautious responses to the familial disintegration. She understands that her behaviour is unseemly (μανθάνω δ' ὀθούνεκα/ἔξωρα πρᾶσσω κοῦκ προσεικότα, *El.* 617–618; cf. 254–255), and her mother accuses her of loud slander (641, 798, 802–803). Cf. Kitzinger (1991); Nooter (2012).

¹⁶ Aristotle recognizes oblique usage as good persuasive technique, since a speaker often needs to say unpleasant things without appearing himself unpleasant (*Rh.* 1418b31–32). In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle cites *Antigone* more often by far than any other play of Sophocles (5 times) and always positively, as producing good examples of useful techniques.

¹⁷ See Worman (2008) 98–99, 101–107.

than he, if she can obtain such dominance without paying for it (484–485). Similarly, in his speech to Haemon Creon regards with horror the possibility of being bested by a woman, against which he sets order and contests with men (677–680). When Haemon urges later that Creon in his solitary despotism will end up ruling an empty land, Creon declares to the Chorus that his son is in allegiance (lit. ‘fellow-fighting’, συμμαχεῖ, 740) with a woman. This, according to Creon, renders Haemon’s character tainted and feminine (746).¹⁸ Toward the end of their increasingly violent exchange, he warns the ‘woman’s slave’ (γυναικὸς ... δούλευμα) who was his son not to flatter him (κώτιλλέ με) (756), marking a mode that he clearly regards as feminine. For nearly the entire duration of their argument, Haemon attempts to maintain his equivocal mildness; but Creon’s harsh perspective and aggressive insults finally goad him into leaving his ‘raving’ (μᾶλιν, 765) father with an ominous finality.

Creon is not, of course, alone among dramatic characters (or actual players on the public stage, for that matter) in promoting the idea that firmness and bold resolve are masculine and a more elastic (i.e. softer) approach to conflict feminine. Indeed, as many scholars have pointed out in recent years, gendered polarities dominate much of the discourse about public speakers’ styles and attitudes in fifth- and fourth-century Athens.¹⁹ Further, a number of famous tragic scenarios in which gender inflects the anxieties surrounding persuasive effects involve just such a dilemma—that is, the terrible recognition that a clever and verbally adept woman might wrest power from the hands of men.²⁰ In *Antigone*, though, Creon’s fear centres more on the apprehension that someone who is, like him, bold and inflexible might bend others to her will and thereby achieve what he cannot: the persuasive power of a stringent adherence to a morality that resonates as older and deeper than his *polis*-oriented values.

This is a fear central to democratic settings more generally—one, indeed, that seems grimly familiar today, in a political environment steeped in pieties about religion and the family and suspicious of broader ideas about the civic good. Politicians, orators, those adept at managing warring

¹⁸ See Griffith (2001) 121–122; cf. also McClure (1995). The term *miaros* typically designates lowbrow and/or hireling speakers in comedy and oratory; cf. chs. 2 and 5.

¹⁹ On *Antigone*, see Foley (1996); Griffith (2001); on these dynamics more generally Zeitlin (1995); McClure (1999); Wohl (2002); Worman (2008).

²⁰ Cf. esp. Clytaemestra in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, and Medea, but also Sophocles’ *Electra* (on which see Nooter 2012).

perspectives on constantly shifting ground are at a disadvantage in such situations, since they will always appear to be less resolved and principled than those who resist dialogue and compromise. The ones who stand firm are heroes; but those who can countenance other views, take the broader outlook, argue for resolutions unsatisfactory to all—what are they?

3. *Oedipus All Alone*

In *Oedipus Tyrannus* the eponymous hero is too arrogant and isolated in his high prospect to promote any fully matched agonistic or invested exchange of ideas. And yet as the clever politician and adept rhetor, Oedipus provides a useful counterpoint to the flexible attitudes and oratorical versatility of Odysseus. In this version of his story, Oedipus is surrounded by those who would or should do his will, as his repeated designation as tyrant (*turannos*, *turannis*) reinforces.²¹ Many of his interlocutors are frightened and in awe of him, although Teiresias plays his familiar role as the challenger of inflexible rule, while Creon and Jocasta provide grim and insightful viewpoints that Oedipus can barely hear.

Oedipus' perspectival isolation is matched by his exceedingly high status. As scholars have noticed, at the outset of the play, a priest and a crowd of young men supplicate him as if he were a god (e.g., προσήμεθα βωμοῖσι σοῖς, 16; ἱκετεύομέν σε, 41); and although the priest claims that they do not regard him as 'equal to the gods' (θεοῖσι ... οὐκ ἰσούμενόν σε) they do deem him 'first of men in the circumstances of life and in converse with the gods' (ἀνδρῶν δὲ πρῶτον ἔν τε συμφοραῖς βίου/κρίνοντες ἔν τε δαιμόνων συναλλαγαῖς) (31–34). The priest emphasizes his dominant nobility (e.g., κράτιστον, βροτῶν ἄριστ', *OT* 40, 46), and Oedipus responds as if the city's miasma were uniquely his to dispel—which of course it is, but not as the wise solver of riddles he takes himself to be. His characterization of his concern is darkly foreboding of his future isolation, since he claims that he has been weeping a lot and 'walking many paths in the wanderings of his mind' (πολλὰς δ' ὁδοὺς ἐλθόντα φροντίδος

²¹ Both Oedipus and most of his interlocutors refer to him as such. Pope (1991) 157 has argued that, given Athens' and other city-states' relatively recent history with tyrants, the ancient audience would have felt the difference between kingship and tyranny. On this account, kingship would have represented the more legitimate sovereignty, familiar from Homer; tyranny, by contrast, is the result of a coup.

πλάνοις, 67). His confidence and physical dominance wane incrementally, but as with Heracles in *Trachiniae* the drama does not centre on his form until late in the action. He slowly degenerates into the 'wretched body' (ἄθλιον δέμας, *OT* 1388; cf. *OC* 576, *Trach.* 1079) offered to the view near the drama's end, a thing that shocks Creon by its 'uncovered' (ἀκάλυπτον, 1427; cf. καλύπτει, 1411) condition—as if its owner were already a corpse (cf. *Aj.* 916, 1003, *Ant.* 28, *Trach.* 1078). It is only then that Oedipus hears and 'sees' what others have earlier suggested, and only then that he breaks with his proud isolation and craves physical contact.

The path to this perspectival and physical reversal is long and tortured. It begins in earnest with an agonistic exchange early on in the drama, in which Teiresias warns Oedipus of his terrible deterioration, the vision of which is so brutally dismantling of his kingly status that he cannot countenance it. He responds with violent anger and a telling myopia, as if the seer's words were calculated only to provoke and deceive him. He opens his speech by invoking his own wealth, sovereignty, and 'skill beyond skill' (ὦ πλοῦτε καὶ τυραννὶ καὶ τέχνῃ τέχνης/ὑπερφέρουσα, 380–381) as the source of such slander, claiming that Teiresias and Creon are plotting against him. His language is high-handed and insulting in the extreme; Creon, he says, desires to overthrow him and thus has sent in 'this trick-stitching sorcerer here, a crafty beggar' (ὑφεῖς μάγον τοιόνδε μηχανορράφον, δόλιον ἀγύρτην), who is 'blind in his craft' (τὴν τέχνην ... τυφλός) (387–389). Oedipus also points out that unlike Teiresias he solved the Sphinx's riddle, so that in his accounting the sovereign has all the skill that the seer ought to possess. Neither Teiresias nor Creon gives Oedipus any obvious reason for his suspicions, beyond being slow to tell him what he wants to hear.

As with Creon in *Antigone*, as the drama progresses the shortsighted pride of the tyrant becomes increasingly painful to witness. At no point do the attempts of others to dissuade Oedipus of his course of action meet with any degree of success; it is he, for the most part, who delivers the speeches and these are all declarative. That is, they do not argue for a course of action but rather state what this domineering ruler takes to be the case: that, for instance, Teiresias and Creon are cheating him (380–403); that, as the child of Polybus and Merope, he left Corinth to escape his curse (771–833); that, having finally fully comprehended who he is, he has pierced his own eyes to deprive himself of sights that could only pain him (1369–1415). The spurious ending contains two further speeches by Oedipus (1446–1475, 1478–1514), both of which give orders and expound upon his situation. In these last, however, he also begs for exile, exhortations that editors have taken to be appended as a means of reshaping the play for later performances with

Oedipus at Colonus.²² This exilic state is, however, not only what the later play dramatizes; it is also most fitting for a character so isolated by his unique status as the clever tyrant that he is blind to his dark history, even as his interlocutors increasingly offer up to him its damning clues.

Further, it is here at the end of the play that Oedipus assumes a physical stature so counter to his intellectual and political one as to be singularly horrifying. And yet it may be just this contrast that renders him more approachable both at this play's end and in *Oedipus at Colonus*. This startling difference is marked particularly by what theorists of theatre semiotics call proxemics (i.e. nearness indicators).²³ While Oedipus remains the bold king with his senses physically intact, his only gestures toward others are commanding or tinged with violence. When, in contrast, he is blind and debilitated, he seeks fond physical contact with his daughters (1480–1483) and connections with or concessions from others (1321–1323, 1469–1474, 1503–1510).

Lowell Edmunds has remarked on the ways in which *Oedipus at Colonus* foregrounds the body of the debilitated exile, placing it in careful proxemic counterpoint to other characters and ultimately ushering it offstage with some ritual pomp.²⁴ While there is little question that this late drama frames Oedipus from the outset as a debased and outcast presence, the tensions it generates around this status appear to foster rather than impede communication. Although, for instance, the old men of Colonus who make up the Chorus exhibit an expected horror upon seeing Oedipus (e.g., he is 'frightening to look upon, frightening to hear', δεινός μὲν ὄραν, δεινός δὲ κλύειν, 141), they are also quick to reach agreement with him on how he ought to be received. Oedipus may in his weakened state seem similar to Philoctetes; and yet his aged, fatherly rank and carefully handled body (especially by Antigone, who remains proximate through much of the action) appear to achieve for him a greater integration within the civic scheme.

This is to say that from the perspective of persuasion and civic-minded interaction, one of the deepest ironies that arises from juxtaposing these two Oedipus plays is that the exile engages his interlocutors in argument with more energy, attention, and success than the king. Indeed, *Oedipus at Colonus* is a strikingly talky play. In all Oedipus gives nine speeches (compared to an average of four per Sophoclean protagonist), most of which are

²² See Olson (1989) for bibliography and overview.

²³ See Elam (1980).

²⁴ Edmunds (1996); see also Murnaghan (1988).

paired with those of others in respectful engagement or agonistic contest. Even more pointed is the fact that when persuasion works in the play it is most prominently that achieved in debate with Athenians (including the Colonus elders). When, for instance, Oedipus urges the elders to grant him sanctuary, he encourages them as Athenians to live up to their liberal status (258–291). They initially respond with some fear, declaring his ‘rhetorical arguments’ startling (ταρβεῖν μέν, ὦ γεραιέ, τάνθυμῆματα, 292), but are persuaded that their king (Theseus) should give him a hearing.

In contrast to this rare positive persuasive atmosphere, which is, again, framed as a distinctly Athenian context, stand the Theban characters who enter Colonus from outside of Attica—Creon and Polyneices. Creon comes across as the double-talking villain that Oedipus thinks he is (and that he is not) in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, while Polyneices’ violent intentions for Oedipus only conform to his earlier ill-treatment of his father. In fact, the play distinguishes quite clearly between those who speak wisely and to good effect (Oedipus, Theseus, and Antigone) and those who do not (Creon and Polyneices). Familiar terms of abuse and approbation cluster on either side of this divide. Oedipus, for example, responds to Creon’s attempts to force him back to Thebes by characterizing him as bold and crafty, in language that sounds like that usually slung at Odysseus (e.g., ‘Oh you who are all-daring and who wrest an intricate trick from any just plea’, ὦ πάντα τολμῶν κάπὸ παντὸς ἄν φέρων/ λόγου δικαίου μηχανήμα ποικίλον, 761–762).²⁵ Oedipus’ lucid and orderly unfolding of the wrongs done him are punctuated by such references. Creon is a man who ‘says harsh things softly’ (σκληρὰ μαλθακῶς λέγων, 774); he offers solutions that are ‘good as speech [i.e., that sound good] but bad as deeds’ (λόγῳ μὲν ἐσθλά, τοῖσι δ’ ἔργοισιν κακά, 782); and his mouth is both false and well sharpened (τὸ σὸν ... ὑπὸ βλητον στόμα, / πολλὴν ἔχον στόμωσιν, 794–795²⁶). Oedipus’ narrative is thus effectively punctuated by characterizations of Creon’s bad faith, which he casts as rhetorical—the dissimulating, devious speech of a politician engaged in subterfuge.

The most common charge for a speaker such as this, who, again, in tragedy tends to be personified by Odysseus, is that he is *deinos legein*, which means something like ‘fearsome at speaking’. *Deinos* encompasses

²⁵ See Worman (1999) and further below.

²⁶ Note that Sophocles sustains this negative emphasis on Creon’s *stoma*, deeming his mouth ‘impious’ (ἀνόσιον στόμα, 981) and his speech slanderous (δυσστομεῖν, 986). In classical Greek literature, when speakers focus on mouths it is usually to insulting effect (see Worman 2008).

much more than simply powerful, however; it indicates an ability that is strange and terrible in its force and therefore never very positive in its effects. Speakers in the democratic assembly level such charges at their opponents, in order to single them out as too polished, clever, and thus untrustworthy.²⁷ Sophocles' characters clearly signal their sense of Creon as a smooth-talking politician who will not hesitate to resort to force—whatever his actual skills—by calling him *deinos*. Oedipus exchanges insults with him, including that he is 'fearsome in tongue' (γλώσση σὺ δεινός, 806; cf. *OT* 545), while the Chorus-leader responds to his threats by declaring, 'You do speak fearsomely' (δεινὸν λέγεις, 861).

In contrast to this portrait of the dastardly politician, Oedipus and Theseus treat each other with grace and respect, often marking their mutual respect by reference to styles of persuasive interaction. When Theseus first arrives and greets his strange guest with a brief address, Oedipus praises his concise speech as an indication of his nobility (569). In a curiously fitting gesture, he also offers the king his 'wretched form' as a host gift (ἄθλιον δέμας/σοὶ δῶρον). From the outset Oedipus and others accord him and his body a special consideration, and here he declares it a unique boon (κέρδος), one better than that provided by the beautiful shape (μορφὴ καλή) traditionally associated with heroes (575–578). And although Theseus cannot quite parse this figure at the moment of its offering, he soon shows his understanding of how important it is to defend. As this 'gift' indicates, their first exchange shows features more common to *xenia* interactions between aristocrats than those tied to the characterization of public speakers in open assembly.

That said, Oedipus successfully gains his sanctuary from Theseus by recourse to a tone that combines prophecy and an adage-heavy long view common to politically agile characters, especially Odysseus. The prophetic style is more suited to Oedipus' status as ritual scapegoat and trophy than to properly democratic exchanges, but the wisdom mode is strikingly similar to the way Odysseus reasons in *Ajax*, and most particularly to the 'cycle of life' section of the speech that Ajax delivers when he mouths the politician's style to mask his suicidal intentions (669–683). Let us briefly consider some details of that early play, a few of which I shall take up again at greater length below. At a pivotal moment in the action, Ajax emerges from his tent grasping the sword that Hector gave him and delivers a speech

²⁷ E.g., Aeschin. 3.174; Lys. 12.86; Dem. 20.146, *Exord.* 32.1; Pl. *Ap.* 17b1–4. Cf. Eur. *Tro.* 968, fr. 442; Soph. *Phil.* 440. See North (1988); Ober (1989) 170–171.

claiming that he has changed his mind, softened his character, and come to appreciate the changeability of things. So winter gives way to spring, the cycle (κύκλος, 672) of night to day; and former enemies become friends (679). The speech is successful, insofar as it convinces his listeners (his concubine Tecmessa and the Salaminian sailors who make up the Chorus) that he has come to his senses. It also makes possible his suicide, since it furnishes him with an excuse to go alone to the seashore, where he can fall on his sword in peace.

Odysseus takes this long view—which importantly encompasses fair treatment of enemies, since they are merely human and human relations are changeable—throughout *Ajax*.²⁸ He pities Ajax from the outset, musing philosophically on the ephemeral status of human existence: ‘I see that we are nothing more than phantoms, however we live, or weightless shadows’ (ὁρῶ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν/εἶδωλ’ ὅσοι περ ζῶμεν ἢ κούφην σκιάν, 125–126). Much later, with his enemy dead and threatened by the sons of Atreus with shameful exposure to the birds and dogs, Odysseus reminds Agamemnon that Ajax was the best of the Achaeans except Achilles (1338–1341). In the exchange that follows, he emphasizes that this enemy hero was once a noble man (1355) and that bonds between friends may change (1359). Odysseus achieves his end, and the drama concludes with preparations for the burial of the hero.

Some forty years later, Sophocles depicts the dilapidated Oedipus as taking the long view in similar terms, although his expression of the world’s mutability carries a much more bitter note:

The strength of the land diminishes, and that of the body,
and trust dies, while its lack bursts forth,
and the same breath never passes again
between men who are friends, nor from city to city.
Now for these friends, in later times for those,
do joys grow bitter and then dear again.

Φθίνει μὲν ἰσχύς γῆς, φθίνει δὲ σῶματος,
θνήσκει δὲ πίστις, βλαστάνει δ’ ἀπιστία,
καὶ πνεῦμα ταῦτόν οὔ ποτ’ οὔτ’ ἐν ἀνδράσιν
φίλοις βέβηκεν οὔτε πρὸς πόλιν πόλει.
τοῖς μὲν γὰρ ἤδη, τοῖς δ’ ἐν ὑστέρω χρόνῳ
τὰ τερπνὰ πικρὰ γίγνεται καὶ οὐδὲς φίλα.

(OC 610–615; my translation)

²⁸ See Worman (1999).

Oedipus' speech emphasizes this fluidity of relations among peers and cities in answer to Theseus' surprise that his own relations with Thebes have taken a darker turn. He clinches this cyclic imagery with a portrait of himself as vampire, a cold corpse drinking the hot blood of warriors (621–622), thus completing with gruesome punctuation what first sounds like an open-handed, balanced view of life's many turns. Yes this unsettling combination of effects convinces Theseus to offer Oedipus protection from strife-filled Thebes and its aggressive emissaries. He successfully beats back the attempts of Creon to take Antigone and Ismene back to Thebes, invoking Athenian fair-mindedness and the law but also indicating that he could use force (904–918).

An escalating emphasis on contact and connection runs parallel to this persuasive philosophizing. When Theseus recovers his daughters, Oedipus seeks them out (especially Antigone) physically, reaffirming the bond with them that had been underlined repeatedly when they are first onstage (1102–1103, 1112–1114; cf. 173, 200–201 [Antigone], 329 [Ismene]). Oedipus is also moved to confirm his bond with the Athenian king, asking for his hand and then recoiling in horror at the idea of contact with his own tainted form:

Stretch forth to me your right hand, Lord, so
that I may grasp it and kiss your head, if it is right.
And yet what am I saying? How could I,
become so wretched, wish to touch a man
on whom no mark of evils dwells?

Καί μοι χέρ', ὦναξ, δεξιάν ὄρεξον, ὥς
ψαύσω φιλήσω τ', εἰ θέμις, τὸ σὸν κάρα.
Καίτοι τι φωνῶ; πῶς σ' ἄν ἄθλιος γεγώς
θιγεῖν θελήσαιμ' ἀνδρὸς ᾧ τίς οὐκ ἔνι
κηλὶς κακῶν ξύννοικος;

(1130–1134; my translation)

Theseus maintains his physical distance, at Oedipus' request (1135), but he responds to his words with warmth and with respect for the hero's familial love, which he measures verbally, since Oedipus had addressed his words first to his daughters and then to Theseus, and then only after Antigone's diplomatic redirection of his attention.

In contrast to this delicate negotiation of fond or reverential physical contact and verbal engagement, we have Creon, who abuses his interlocutors and attempts physical violence. As mentioned, *Oedipus at Colonus* paints Creon's character as mercenary and violent, and the reception of his speeches reflect this, with Oedipus, Theseus, and the Chorus all highlighting their clever, manipulative style. The drama thus sharply distinguishes Creon and Theseus, as leaders at opposite ends of the moral and

persuasive spectrum. Creon is insulting to Oedipus and arrogant and manipulative with Theseus; he pairs this verbal aggression with attempts to wrest Antigone and Ismene from their father (817–819, 836–844).

Two of Oedipus' children also mark these opposite ends: Antigone is (as elsewhere) a loyal prop, firm of speech, and brave; Polyneices is a bold, violent would-be usurper who exiled his father and has kept his distance since. Antigone repeatedly emphasizes the importance of verbal exchange (1187–1188, 1193–1194, 1280–1283) and manages to persuade her father in a limited way, while Polyneices achieves the opposite, confirming his father's anger and resistance. Even more pointedly, Antigone's small victory attempts to serve the interests of her less integrated sibling, since she succeeds in convincing her father to give her brother an audience. While Oedipus deems giving in to Antigone's words—which largely concern yielding to the persuasive arguments of *philoî*—a 'bitter pleasure' (βαρεῖαν ἡδονήν, 1204), he curses his son. Violently rebuffing Polyneices' attempts at tearful reconciliation, Oedipus states first that he has given his son an audience only to please his host, then blames his pitiful state on Polyneices, calls an evil *daimôn* down on him, and finally 'spits' him from himself, fatherless (σὺ δ' ἔρρ' ἀπόπτυστός τε κἀπάτωρ ἐμοῦ, 1383). It is a terrible exchange, and as the *agôn* of highest intensity, it furnishes an appropriately shocking entrée to Oedipus' portentous exit from the stage and from life.

4. *Odysseus to the Rescue?*

In Sophocles' tragedies Odysseus combines a sometimes unscrupulous equivocation with the cleverness and eloquence of the politician. *Ajax* depicts this unsettling combination as a contrast between what this diverse hero is and what others think a pragmatic politician must be—that is, mercenary and manipulative. Aspects of this negative profile converge around linguistic techniques: the Chorus of Salaminian sailors envisions Odysseus' 'sly whisperings' (λόγους ψιθύροις, 148) about Ajax's madness and the mean pleasure they give the listener (151–152). They also warn against 'secret stories' (κλέπτουσι μύθοις, 188) and unbridled tongues that have the power to wound (198–199). When Ajax's vision clears, he groans at the thought of the pleasure that this 'all-seeing tool of evils' (πάνθ' ὁρῶν τ' ἀει/κακῶν ὄργα-νον) might get from his downfall (379–382); to him Odysseus is a 'wheel-drawer' (αἰμυλώτατον, 388) and an irritant (381, 389).

But in fact Odysseus' treatment of Ajax is relatively even-handed; he voices the sentiments of the pragmatic man, who does not bear a grudge

because he is aware of the shifting nature of the gods' wrath. As noted, Odysseus' traditional talents for circumlocution and verbal disguise are matched in the play by the circular nature of friendship he represents, demonstrated by his new-found pity for Ajax in his frenzy (121–126) and later in his unexpected defence of the hero's corpse (1332–1373). This flexible attitude is directly opposed to Ajax's rigid assessment of heroic alliances. Again, only in the 'lying' speech that he uses to elude those who would prevent his suicide (i.e. only when he speaks like Odysseus), does Ajax acknowledge as typically human the shifting fluctuation of sentiments that resembles the variable allegiances of the political man (646–692). In the play as a whole, Odysseus shows an attention to balance and proportion that is central to his heroic type and familiar especially from his character in the *Iliad*. He can see the divine payback for excessive hubris, and just as he would not wish such a fate on himself, so he regrets it for another.

As I have mentioned above, Odysseus' later defence of Ajax's corpse sets forth clearly a pragmatic attention to fair treatment and the long view. When Agamemnon and Menelaus threaten to prevent burial of the body, Odysseus engages in a crucial contest of wills with Agamemnon, in which he urges that, although Ajax was most hateful to him when they argued over Achilles' arms, now he cannot dishonour him in return (ἀντατιμάσαιμ', 1339²⁹) by not giving him his due. Odysseus argues that a good man when he dies must get as good as he has given, being fairly and publicly recognized by fine words and the proper treatment of his corpse. When Agamemnon disagrees, Odysseus explains that he only hated Ajax when it was fitting to do so (1347), that further vaunting is the equivalent of ill-gotten gains (κέρδεσιν τοῖς μὴ καλοῖς, 1349). He counsels the king to apportion honour (τιμὰς νέμειν, 1351) to friends giving good advice, and when Agamemnon reminds him of what sort of man he would commemorate with such favour (χάρις, 1354), Odysseus replies that Ajax's virtue far outweighed his vice (1357). Finally, he points out that he himself will face the same end (i.e. death) and be in need of similar favour (1365). When Agamemnon questions his self-serving attitude, Odysseus replies, 'Whom is it more fitting [εἰχὸς] that I serve?' (1367).

Although *Ajax* was composed quite early in the sophistic period, we might note that this emphasis on suitability is a technique attributed especially to early teachers of the rhetorical art.³⁰ *Eikos* arguments address

²⁹ This is Bothe's emendation; the various manuscripts and editors' suggestions all agree at least on ἀτιμάσαιμ'.

³⁰ In *Phaedrus* Plato credits Corax and Teisias with developing *eikos* arguments (267d6).

probability—that is, what can be reasonably assumed about a particular type of person in a particular situation. Here Odysseus invokes suitability to balance the fate of the hero off against his own, honouring Ajax with his arguments, asking that honour be allotted likewise to him for doing so, and then urging that one ought to grant the honour that one would wish to get for oneself. This attention to proportion arouses a strong reaction from the Achaean leader, as similar sophistic techniques did among the Athenian élite. In the midst of their exchange, Agamemnon calls men stupid (ἔμπληκτοι, 1358) who make the sort of reversal that Odysseus is counselling. Odysseus responds that many people are friendly and bitter by turns, and that a rigid type (σκληράν, 1361) ought not to be admired. This flexibility can also encompass reversals of position (e.g. making the weaker the stronger argument) which the sophists are credited with making famous during the second half of the fifth century.

Philoctetes explores more fully and with much more negative valence how Odysseus' role as politician may generate an atmosphere of deceit and manipulation. The play, which dramatizes the Achaean's need for Philoctetes and his bow in sacking Troy, was staged in 408 BC, after Athens had suffered the oligarchic coup of 411 BC and then restored its democracy at the demands of troops victorious in Cyzicus.³¹ *Philoctetes* was thus produced in the period directly following the most profound upheaval democratic Athens had yet faced; and during the next two years Athens' fortunes in the Peloponnesian War (as well as the grain supply) depended at least in part on the suspect machinations of Alcibiades in the Hellespont and environs.³² While on its surface the drama bears little relation to these events, it does take place on Lemnos, a deserted island in the eastern Aegean, and does feature a hero riddled by disease (cf. civic miasma?) at the mercy of a politician's treacherous manoeuvres.

When the play opens, Odysseus explains that Philoctetes—who suffers periodic apoplexia from a stinking, suppurating wound to his foot received while trespassing the nymph Chryse's precinct—had to be removed from the community because his wild, inauspicious cries (ἀγρίαις/ ... δυσφημίαις, 9–10) disrupted libation and sacrifice. That is, Odysseus claims that his 'shouting and groaning' (βοῶν, στενάζων, 11) was a threat to group cohesion, depicting Philoctetes' outcast state as a direct result of his noisy debilitation.

³¹ Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.14; Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 34.1.

³² During this period Alcibiades was in exile, having effectively played double agent to Sparta and Persia; he seems to have had a hand in the coup, but then because of his victories in the east was welcomed home in 408 as a hero (Xen. *Hell.* 1.3; Plut. *Alc.* 27–34).

Philoctetes, for his part, associates Odysseus and his evil-working mouth with the bite. This is the man who, Philoctetes says, ‘touches all slander and devilry with his tongue’ (παντός ... λόγου κακοῦ/ γλώσση θιγόντα καὶ πανουργίας, 407–408). When he hears that Odysseus is somewhere on the island, he exclaims at the horrible thought of Odysseus aiming to persuade him by ‘wheedling speeches’ (λόγοισι μαλθακοῖς) and declares that he ‘would far rather give ear to the hateful snake’ (θάσσον ἂν τῆς πλείστον ἐχθίστης ἐμοί/κλύοιμ’ ἐχίδνης, 631–632) that left him in his outcast state than to the man who will say and do anything (cf. πάντα λεκτά, πάντα δέ/τολμητά, 633–634).

The play thus stringently opposes Odysseus’ manipulative rhetoric to the lonely vocalizations of the bitten hero. While Philoctetes may disrupt sacrificial ritual with his wild locutions, the deceitful verbiage of Odysseus poisons its listener like the serpent’s bite. Connections between snake-like qualities and rhetorical agility turn up in Platonic dialogue and fourth-century oratory as well, so that Philoctetes’ experience of Odysseus as a poisonous politician participates in a common discourse around sophistic types.³³ Further, in a city so rattled by war and civic upheaval that some citizens were poised to welcome home the traitorous but masterfully manipulative Alcibiades, the figure of the similarly ruthless and manipulative Odysseus would have offered an ominous but tempting suggestion.

Early in the play Odysseus attempts to train a reluctant Neoptolemus in the art of rhetorical deceptions. The political pragmatist informs the young man of honour that he must ‘steal the soul of Philoctetes with speeches’ (τὴν Φιλοκτήτου σε δεῖ/ψυχὴν ὅπως λόγοισιν ἐκκλέψεις λέγων, 54–55), and encourages him to use his instructor as a figure of abuse. He suggests that Neoptolemus tell a tale of anger over Achilles’ arms (i.e. the Ajax story) to impugn ‘Odysseus’, as a veil for his own plot. Neoptolemus professes himself reluctant to serve as an agent of deception, urging force instead (90–91). The contrast between persuasion and force would have been a familiar one to late fifth-century Athenian audiences, since during this period tragedies often highlighted this conundrum as central to heroic dilemmas; and the sophist Gorgias had famously emphasized it in his display speech in defence of Helen and rhetorical persuasion.³⁴ Unlike the earlier *Ajax*, *Philoctetes* depicts Odysseus as a man with solutions that are morally reprehensible but expedient and therefore, in the calculus of war, necessary. This too would

³³ Cf. Ober (1989) 169–171; Worman (2000) 29–33.

³⁴ See Worman (2002) 156–165.

have sounded familiar to Athenians, since politicians such as Cleon appear to have made similar arguments in assembly.³⁵ And so, in response to Neoptolemus' moral scruples, Odysseus offers a brutal code: deceit is not shameful if it rescues a situation; if one's actions are beneficial, it is not fitting to shrink from them (108–111).

When Neoptolemus and Odysseus later argue over what to do with Philoctetes' bow, which Neoptolemus obtained by Odysseus' deceptive plot and now desires to return, they disagree about what constitute just actions in straitened circumstances. Neoptolemus declares that what is just is more compelling than what is wise (1246), effectively rejecting Odysseus' emphasis on the useful, clever ruse. Odysseus, characteristically, takes the broad view, this time one that focuses on group needs, repeatedly invoking the Achaean army as a threat and a responsibility that should outweigh justification of Neoptolemus' guilty action (1242–1243, 1250–1251, 1257–1258). Neoptolemus is not persuaded immediately by Odysseus' emphasis on the army's likely censure and its pressing needs, but he then engages energetically in persuasive tactics of his own, counselling Philoctetes to abandon his stubborn commitment to suffering (1318–1323). Scholars of the drama rarely notice this subtle turn, coming as it does so late in the action, but it implies an appreciation of Odysseus' aims as attending to what is crucial in the longer view. And while he does not accomplish these aims by his own plotting alone, his dogged attention to them indirectly moves the action forward, until Heracles appears *ex machina* and with a sweep of his divine hand achieves Odysseus' aim of getting the recalcitrant hero back to Troy.

It is not quite right, then, to say that no one achieves persuasion on the Sophoclean stage. Rather, we can recognize that in limited circumstances, certain characters do manage to move others to acknowledge the weight of their claims, if not to give in to their reasoning entirely. Oedipus in exile and the denigrated Odysseus are the most effective persuaders—that is, heroes known for their political skills but reduced in their sway, when they are either forced to, or by nature apt to, take the broader or longer view. When other characters manage to move an interlocutor in some narrowly circumscribed manner, as Antigone does Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, and as Haemon attempts in *Antigone* and Neoptolemus in *Philoctetes*, they usually follow suit, urging communication, compromise, reversals of fortune, group censure and need. Odysseus, the most flexible and effective of

³⁵ Thuc. 3.36 ff.

speakers, tends to opt for shorter speeches and direct engagement—an implicit critique of the sophists' penchant for *makroi logoi*, even though their skills would seem to constitute his special equipment. In sharp contrast, Sophoclean heroes are usually given to long, declarative speeches and are impossible to move, stubborn in their crises, incapable of hearing others and of seeing beyond their dire circumstances. But then dialogue, shorter speeches, and a flexible perspective cannot possibly consolidate the staunch autonomy that is central to these heroes. The long view is not a heroic one; and the politician is nobody's hero.

NARRATOLOGY OF DRAMA: SOPHOCLES THE STORYTELLER

Andreas Markantonatos

Introduction

Although I am fully aware of the fact that theories about narration are amongst the least amenable of all modern critical formulations to being summarized, we cannot properly understand the following discussion of the narrative semiotics of drama in general and Sophoclean storytelling in particular without emphasizing some recent crucial developments in the field of narratology.¹ It is commonly accepted that storytelling is an intrinsically human practice.² The same applies to storylistening, storyreading, and storywatching—neologisms which aim to describe the full spectrum of relationships between tellers of tales and their audiences. These newly coined terms form part of a wider set of ideas and proposals intended to explain the special ways in which humans make sense of the world around them through various acts of storytelling. People listen to, read, or watch stories being told in different media and from diverse perspectives. There are indeed cases in which the narrator of the story is either indiscernible or altogether absent. But do not let this one fact escape your notice: there is always an ultimate teller in both narrated and narratorless media, namely the person behind the story, be he the author, the dramatist, or the cinematographer. Much as storytellers of all eras have taken great pains to hide their true identity behind countless personas, or even completely erase it in theatre and cinema, there is always a commanding intelligence pulling the strings and making the story the way it is.³

Further, what is remarkable about stories is that, if recounted effectively, they have the power to capture the imagination of audiences and transport them to another world—in other words they induce an altered state of

¹ On general introductions to narratology, see recently Kindt/Müller (2003); Ryan (2004); Herman/Vervaeck (2005); Jahn (2005); Meister (2005); Phelan/Rabinowitz (2005); Herman (2007); Herman/Jahn/Ryan (2008); Hühn/Pier/Schmid/Schönert (2009); Fludernik (2009).

² See (e.g.) Abbott (2008²) 1–12, who notes that '[g]iven the presence of narrative in almost all human discourse, there is little wonder that there are theorists who place it next to language itself as *the* distinctive human trait' (p. 1).

³ See Markantonatos (2002), who offers a detailed theory of a narratology of drama.

consciousness. It goes without saying that both theatre and cinema have the technological means to create large-scale fictional worlds out of actual and non-actual states and events, thereby engaging audiences in an extraordinary aesthetic and learning experience. This notion is as old as Aristotle, in whose famous treatise the *Poetics* it is a fundamental premise, that there is a natural human propensity towards mimesis: people of all cultures find pleasure in make-believe, because on one level they enjoy artistry and craftsmanship, but on another level they delight in acquiring new knowledge through verbal-visual works of the imagination.⁴ These are the basic principles of what has lately become known as storytelling theory, which in its ever growing expansion has come to include all long-established branches of narratology in a comprehensive theoretical proposition aiming at analyzing not only the form and content of verbal and visual tales but also their historical and literary context.⁵ In particular, most critics working in the field of modern literary theory today seek to integrate the entire range of narratological methods with aesthetic and ideological critical idioms, bringing a wide variety of viewpoints to bear upon individual works. They make effective use of numerous critical resources such as Old and New Historicism, Anthropology, Sociology, Reception Aesthetics, and Intertextuality in order to deal with the intricate narratological questions raised by the plays. As it now seems better to grapple with the phenomenon of narration more holistically than before, it is fair to suggest that narratology has gradually evolved into a grand theory which aims to characterize and tackle the fiendish complexity of storytelling by offering profound considerations which approach the issue from more than one angle.

Most classicists have become acquainted with these novel theoretical formulations professing to explain the workings of narrative patterns and, more generally, the forces governing the manipulation and dissemination of narrative information in storytelling activities, through the scholarship of Irene de Jong, a Dutch academic expert, who was the first to apply the lessons of traditional narratology to ancient Greek literature, especially Homer's *Iliad*.⁶ Notwithstanding the excessive rigidity of her taxonomy and

⁴ See Halliwell (1987) 78–84 and (1992).

⁵ See recently Grethlein/Rengakos (2009), who convincingly argue that 'technical analysis of narrative ought not however to be an end in itself, but needs to be made fruitful for interpretation' (p. 3).

⁶ De Jong (1987). But Fusillo (1985) has also a fair claim to be the first, although his narrative analysis of Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* made little impact on scholarly circles at the time. For a more interesting and readable discussion of Homer's narrative techniques, see Richardson (1990).

the abstruseness of her algebraic notations, the importance of her contribution to a better understanding of Homer's narrative techniques cannot be overestimated. More crucially for my argument, after dissecting the Homeric text to uncover its underlying narrative structures, de Jong went on to revive long-forgotten views on the subjectivity of the tragic messenger speech, as well as attempting to classify select instances of Euripidean *angeliae* in narratological terms. In particular, she pressed the point that the often seriously overlooked figure of the Messenger, one of the most familiar conventions of the Greek stage, is in fact a highly individualized character whose judgment is inevitably limited and biased as opposed to the widely held opinion that tragic *angeliae* lay claim to impartiality and reliability in view of their seeming detachment and comprehensiveness.⁷ To put it in a nutshell, de Jong was able to establish beyond reasonable doubt that the tragic Messenger is a fully-fledged storyteller.

More importantly, her analysis of the functionality of the Euripidean Messenger was narratology's first major foray into the study of Greek drama amid an atmosphere of intense hostility towards modern critical methods, not to mention of course a deeply entrenched conviction, prevalent mainly amongst traditional narratologists and often bordering on instinctive antipathy, that a narratological explication of a narratorless literary work is nothing less than a travesty of the narrative theory itself. Although in her monograph on Euripides de Jong again failed to break free from her customary pedantry and abstractionism, she removed (unconsciously, as it has become perfectly evident in her later work!)⁸ a significant barrier between narrative and drama in the mind of many experts who were until then under the illusion that there is an unbridgeable gap between telling and showing, thereby paving the way for significant changes in the critical idiom of classical scholarship. In her wake appeared a small number of classical scholars who treated Attic drama as pure storytelling, working on the assumption that the term 'narrative' is broad enough to include stories comprised only of characters, events, and a setting, but not recounted by external tellers, while at the same time reacting against her exclusive categorization of Euripidean messenger speeches and inflexible, reactionary dogmatism on the applicability of narratological principles to narratorless media such as dramatic texts and cinematic works.⁹

⁷ De Jong (1991). Cf. also Barrett (2002).

⁸ De Jong (2006) 74–75. For a critique of de Jong's narratological work on Greek tragedy, see Machemer (1995); Markantonatos (2002) 16n37.

⁹ See mainly Goward (1999); Lowe (2000) esp. 157–187; Gould (2001); Markantonatos (2002); Lamari (2010). Cf. also Hopman (2009) and Scodel (2009). On the application of

Since then Greek tragedy has been seen as a special kind of narrative which lacks an external narrator, while simultaneously thriving on internal narrators—that is, a story employing exceptional techniques (more in line with distinctly cinematic effects) to circumvent the total absence of a perceptible extradramatic teller-figure, as well as giving intradramatic characters great narratorial leverage. In fact, there are strong grounds for believing that ancient dramatists, not unlike modern cinematic *auteurs* who enunciate their narratives in accordance with their personal creative vision, had enormous control over the special ways in which the story unfolded onstage, given that, among much else, they author the script, as well as training the actors (the members of the Chorus included) and arranging the scenery. However much one might suppose that the staging of an ancient play was a collective process involving both amateurs and professionals, together with wealthy sponsors and democratically elected administrators, and all these operating harmoniously under pressure in the context of popular religious festivals, there is no doubt at all that the dramatist shines through this collaborative endeavour, as is clearly evident from the everlasting fame of the three great tragedians of classical Greece (i.e. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides) and the paucity of information about their numerous amateur and professional associates. It is not therefore too bold to suggest that in fifth-century Athens all other men who had a hand in an ancient dramatic production were completely eclipsed by the playwright.¹⁰

The radical idea that ‘narrative is not an adjunct to dramatic technique but part of its very essence’¹¹ made a profound impact on the study of ancient (and modern) theatre, principally because classical scholars became acutely conscious of the fact that each and every tragic play is a narrative construction on a large scale—that is, a mimetic narrative in the form of a pregnant conflation of crisis and resolution where the present distends itself to include past and future through scores of onstage narrators, be they characters or choristers. More generally, tragedy is a remarkable narrative tool for shaping the confused material of Greek mythology into intentional

narratological concepts to drama, see recently Jahn (2001); Vanhaesebrouck (2004); Sommer (2005); Schenk-Haupt (2007); Richardson (2007); Fludernik (2008); Hühn/Sommer (2009); Nünning/Sommer (2009); Ryan (2009); Weidle (2009). However, some critics are not amenable to this broad view of narrative: Dunn (2009a) sides with de Jong against those who embrace a larger perspective on dramatic storytelling, arguing that ‘among classicists the attempt to offer a comprehensive narratology of drama has not succeeded’ (p. 340).

¹⁰ On the centrality of the playwright in Athenian drama, see Rehm (1992) 20–30, who states categorically that ‘[t]he *sine qua non* for dramatic productions was, of course, the playwright’ (p. 23).

¹¹ Markantonatos (2002) 221.

structures which in turn generate fascinating insights into Athenian life and history.¹² Unlike the practitioners of novelistic prose who find pleasure in hiding behind tellers of various levels of reliability, or that famous rhapsode known by the name of Homer who allows omniscient narrators to command the flow of his monumental epic compositions with a sure hand, the dramatist takes it upon himself to bring the tragic narrative to life for his audience without recourse to avatars and personas. Besides, the mimetic nature of theatrical storytelling, compounded by the compulsory use of masks in Attic drama, renders narrative personas superfluous and ineffective.

Furthermore, it is important not to overlook that dramatic (and cinematic) storytelling makes allowances for this generic peculiarity: the *dramatis personae*, together with the members of the Chorus, enact all temporal digressions, be they flash-backs or flash-forwards, given that both acceleration and deceleration of action are virtually impossible in view of the rigorously fixed pace of theatrical time.¹³ There are, however, cases in which dramatic time is conveniently bent to make room for particular spatiotemporal discrepancies: narrative breaks can occur in scene changes, as well as between plays of a single-themed trilogy. It is also noteworthy that often in Greek drama choral odes and act-dividing lyric dialogues allow for longer or shorter stretches of time to elapse than one would expect from their actual performance. To blur the line between indoor and outdoor space, dramatists use the *ekkyklema*, a wheeled platform rolled out through the central gate of the stage building. The *ekkyklema* brings out a tableau from inside the *skene* into the sight of the spectators, openly flouting all spatiotemporal conventions, while at the same time weaving the secondary story material integrally into the play without textual input from the characters' knowledge of the myth; it is, in fact, a remarkable instance of a mimetic narrative imported into a larger mimetic narrative for the purpose of pushing an essential part of the story inside the expensive and limited borders of the principal narrative level.¹⁴

More importantly, and more crucially for my last point, in Greek tragedy the dramatist, through the agency of his characters, controls the access to

¹² On the close relationship between Athenian politics and Greek tragedy, see recently Markantonatos/Zimmermann (2012) with abundant bibliography (see especially Markantonatos 2012). Cf. also Carter (2011) with interesting essays which contribute to the current debate about the political and social aspects of Greek tragedy.

¹³ See Markantonatos (2002) 7–8.

¹⁴ On the *ekkyklema*, see Markantonatos (2002) 9 with further bibliography.

and flow of information around a complex network of primary and secondary narratives. Staged action, forming the principal narrative level of the play, expands to include multiple subordinate levels of narrational knowledge by means of the characters' storytelling ability. It is often the case that specific events, either past or future, are repeatedly filtered through different characters, the reason being that Greek dramatists favour a polyphonic presentation of unstaged action, rather than exclusively screening offstage episodes through a single storyteller. Given the diverse cast of characters inhabiting tragic space, not to mention of course the impassable chasm that often separates personality from personality as regards foibles and whims, the manifold recounting of the same set of events in the course of the play allows for an extraordinary narration which replicates itself, transforms itself, challenges itself, sometimes even leaving crucial gaps in the analysis of side stories so as to highlight the chaos and lack of order or design in the past and the future. In Greek tragedy we can hardly fail to recognize the suspending function of repetition in the fragmentary and disjointed causal sequence of narrated actions, regardless of the characters' continuous efforts to lay these narrative hanks end to end in a neat series. Given that throughout the plays characters and actions are constantly seen through the narrative glass and perhaps distorted by it, the introduction of subordinate tales complicates moral principles and commitments, while at the same time teasing the audience with glimpses of storyline twists held in reserve. It is reasonable to suggest that in Greek tragedy the interface between staged action and reported action, as well as the cross connections between theatrical fiction and Athenian reality, allow for endless forms of hermeneutic play with space, time, and narration.

1. *The Narrative Art of Sophocles*

Much as the narrative art of Sophocles is by no means easy to appreciate judging from a minor part of what was an enormous output of 123 plays, it is important to reflect that careful examination of the remaining seven tragedies (not to mention the numerous substantial fragments) may help critics to apprehend the full narrational bearings of what time has spared.¹⁵ There are strong grounds for thinking that in his later surviving plays, especially in *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, Sophocles

¹⁵ For brief discussions of Sophocles' narrative art, see de Jong (2004) and (2007). Cf. also Goward (1999) 85–118.

has reached a power and massiveness of narrative manipulation which other contemporary dramatists (Euripides included) have hardly surpassed, unless in the exceedingly self-referential and narratively intricate *Bacchae*.¹⁶ In *Oedipus at Colonus*, in particular, Sophocles explores the full range of narrative possibilities in reporting crucial story material which happens to lie outside the staged timespan, as well as endowing an individual player, namely Oedipus, with authoritative knowledge of past and future that marks him off from other players.¹⁷ Here one is impressed by the balance of hope and fear—the gloom hanging over the opening scene, a horror of a violent distant past which neither Oedipus' penetrating gaze into the future of Athens, nor Antigone's passionate plea for mercy can lift or dissipate; a darkness which deepens with every searching question of the Chorus, until as early as the first quarter of the play it closes upon all present with Oedipus' shocking confession about the incestuous origin of his offspring. This seemingly premature narrational climax, highlighting as it does humanity's never-ending struggle with the overmastering force of circumstance, in which the microcosm of an essentially great life is shaken to its core, evokes Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, that unparalleled narrative ordering of an inexplicable and impossible situation which also retraces past moments that Oedipus has never exorcised.¹⁸

And yet it is exactly this slow and agonizing unravelling of the past which not only prepares the hearts of the spectators to take the most thrilling possible impression from a horrendous revelation about Oedipus' incestuous family, but also, and more crucially, becomes a triumph of one kind of narrative power over another: the final displacement of selfish individualism and thoughtless hostility by a deep-seated sense of justice and sincere humanity. Oedipus, a man with a thoroughly reasonable moral code, has not run the whole gamut of human emotions from joy to despair, only to wallow in self-pity at the end of his life stranded between secular and cultic space. Sophocles believes profoundly that the passionate self-assertion of conscious innocence may make an end of guilt and inaugurate a brighter day in the face of blind unreflecting violence. In other words, Oedipus, a past-tense narrator gradually, and rather reluctantly at first, transformed into a future-tense storyteller, organizes with outstanding mastery past and future events into a close-knit narrative sequence leading to a commanding centre: his ethical purity.

¹⁶ Cf. Markantonatos (2002), (2004), (2004–2005), and (2007).

¹⁷ See Markantonatos (2002) 18–19.

¹⁸ Cf. Segal (1995) 138–160 and (2001²) 53–70; Lowe (2000) 182.

It is remarkable, moreover, that while Oedipus seeks to make sense of a maze of narrative interlacings which bind his personal story with an enormously complex set of unexpected occurrences, thereby organizing a disarray of horrible events in a teleological manner, his miraculous passing in the recesses of the inviolate grove of Colonus becomes the blind spot in the play, invisible from excess of narrative light—a glaring gap in the story jigsaw about which nothing can be said with certainty, regardless of sackloads of relevant narrative conjectures presented in such diverse forms as choral ode, messenger speech, and lament. It is indicative of Sophocles' originality and invention that his play's master storyteller, an imposing figure constantly recreating past and future over an abyss of moral danger, disappears into a kind of narrative black hole. In fact, however many rival versions about Oedipus' death may coexist in the final scene of the play, all of these futile and unenlightening, his unnarrated apotheosis turns out to be the never-weakening spring of Athens' unsuppressible endurance, since it is Oedipus himself who bequeaths the assurance of victory in war to the faithful guardians of his secret tomb.¹⁹

2. *Sophocles' Ajax: Narrative and Hero Worship*

Even though I firmly believe that Sophocles' narrative power reaches its zenith in his later plays, his earlier plays not only bolster my belief in his absolute and unerring mastery of the storytelling craft, but also allow critics to explore his narrative art as it evolved over a substantial period of time. For this reason, in the remainder of this chapter and within its rather limited compass I shall discuss as briefly as possible certain aspects of the narrative construction of his earliest surviving play, *Ajax*, most likely dated to the early 440s BC, focusing on an extraordinary instance of narratorial planning in which Sophocles touches a depth of three levels of narrative embedding.²⁰ I shall also examine how this masterly manipulation of viewpoint and narration intensifies the political impact of the play, seeking to highlight the special ways in which Sophocles manages the complexity of multiple narrative lines through a deft handling of past and future in order to reflect man's unconquerable force and determination in a universe capable of strange

¹⁹ See Markantonatos (2002) 115–160.

²⁰ On the date of *Ajax*'s first performance, see Garvie (1998) 6–7; Hesk (2003) 14; Finglass (2011) 1–11. Cf. also Storey/Allan (2005) 115.

and sudden reversals and, more particularly, in order to underline one of the cornerstones of Athenian democratic ideology—the principle that divine laws must prevail over transient human passions.

In *Ajax* there are signs of an enlightened and refined concept of tragic narration and its primary importance in the art of Attic theatre; what is more, in a manner similar to *Oedipus at Colonus* there is an impressive intrusion of narrative information upon a great crisis, establishing a significant relationship between onstage and offstage worlds, while simultaneously accentuating crucial elements of the original myth which have been overlaid by fifth-century Athenian religious and political applications.²¹ It is no accident that certain minor figures turn out to have a vital narrative power, projecting fears and guesses from the past onto the future, for often in Greek tragedy characters acting as foils for the principal personages mirror the alternative paths events might have taken in the course of the drama; obviously, the more narrative significance the dramatist assigns to a character, the more effective an agent in the plot he becomes. Moreover, foils hammer home the fact that the story is one possibility among many, since the narrative seeds are everywhere in the text, and it lies with the dramatist to let them grow into full-blown subplots.²² By constantly thrusting incidentals to the narrative foreground, Sophocles gives the audience a solid basis on which they can read the play; his skilful control of narrative pace and perspective, as well as his carefully-plotted side stories, persistently holding out the prospect of various alternative solutions, not only compress a large amount of offstage action into the here and now of staged narration, but also anticipate crisis developments in the play. It is therefore fair to say that Sophocles often uses embedded narrative modes to establish that particular episodes are microcosmic of the main story as a whole.

My chief point is that in order to understand how Sophocles' *Ajax* might have functioned in its fifth-century Athenian setting, it is important to bring narratological insights to bear upon the close relationship between the scene with Tecmessa and the Messenger (719–814), which immediately precedes the suicide of Ajax in a deserted tract of the Trojan shore, and the concluding scenes of the play (1047–1420), which evaluate the repercussions of Ajax's death.²³ There has been much debate on the issue of hero worship

²¹ See de Jong (2006), who offers a narratological discussion of the play, focusing on the repeated presentation of Ajax's mad attack on the flocks and herds of the Greek army.

²² See primarily Markantonatos (2002) 16.

²³ For some preliminary thoughts, see Markantonatos (2008) esp. 209–217.

in Sophocles' *Ajax*; in fact, there are strong arguments for and against the view that at the end of the play Ajax is elevated to the semi-divine status of a cultic hero.²⁴ Though many critics have renounced any hope of gaining light upon the chthonian connotations of the play, I shall argue that the narrative analysis of the messenger speech, which comes as early as the middle of the play, not only reinforces the theory that there is a sacramental idea in Ajax's suicide, but also encourages us to think that certain political concerns closely related to Athenian hero worship are mapped onto the drama. The Messenger's awe and respect for Ajax is part of a wider Sophoclean strategy of using embedded narratives to highlight the cult-aspect of the protagonist, as well as stemming a wave of rumour-mongering, slander, and lies aiming to besmirch his reputation and undermine his survival in the social memory of Greek culture. At the same time the sharp contrast between the Messenger's narratorial subtlety and the Greek chieftains' unbridled condemnation of Ajax for his furious resentment and violence has special relevance to an Athenian democratic audience.

There is an atmosphere of numinous awe throughout the play and, more importantly, there are strong overtones of hero worship in the Messenger's account of the action preceding the death of Ajax (748–783). In particular, there are deeper meanings in the special ways in which the Messenger filters offstage events, as he constantly nests all unfavourable comments regarding Ajax's egotism and folly into secondary and tertiary levels of narration, thereby refraining as far as possible from an ugly description of him, while simultaneously revealing the inception of the divine wrath against him: Ajax is an admirable hero, but his high-spiritedness and fearlessness are fatally tinged by arrogant boastfulness. This does not mean, however, that Ajax met with the gravest disgrace and dishonour at Troy because of inherent defects and failures; his irreverent self-importance was in no way an innate fault in his nature. Accordingly, the Messenger takes great pains to avoid adding his voice to the growing chorus of criticism against Ajax's disrespect for divine authority, deliberately making extensive use of direct and indirect speech in order to maintain the narrative frontiers between what is reported and who is doing the reporting. His narratorial tact and diplomacy are an early indication of the eventual consecration to Ajax of heroic honours in the final scene of the play, where another

²⁴ See principally Burian (1972); Segal (1981a) 142–146; Henrichs (1993); Seaford (1994a) 394–405; Hesk (2003) 21–24 and 86–89; Garvie (2005) 12; Finglass (2011) 46–51 with further notes.

skilful narrator, Teucer, makes every effort to stem a massive discharge of insulting tales about his half-brother, as well as trying to abolish the disgraceful scenario of his non-burial. Both the Messenger and Teucer take it upon themselves to stop an incessant stream of narrative information which aims to guide the audience to assemble a dark picture of the protagonist, whilst ardently striving to halt negative narrative developments from reaching their planned conclusion. In their effort they find an unexpected ally, Odysseus, who appears upon the scene, and who, with his cool-headedness and gracefulness, as well as his superb judgment and subtlety, persuades Agamemnon to change his inflexible stance and allow the funeral of Ajax.

Furthermore, there is every reason for thinking that Sophocles employs a purposeful narrative pattern which exploits the cult-prominence of Ajax in Attica in order to bring the drama politically closer to the present.²⁵ The Messenger's narratorial prudence, as well as his emphasis on Ajax's supporters and friends such as Calchas, adumbrate Odysseus' admirable display of calm modesty and unpretentious kindness in the closing scenes of the play, where by contrast Agamemnon and Menelaus feel no compunction about washing away the memory of a robust Hellenic hero of epic achievement with a torrent of gross insults, direct lies, and unflattering stories. In his sanity and decency, as well as in his pity, Odysseus comes to represent a fundamental element of Athenian democratic tradition, given that it is a stock trait of ancient encomiastic literature to extol the Athenians' profound sense of justice and forgiveness in the face of thoughtless cruelty; as a matter of fact, widespread is the idea in fourth-century Attic funeral orations that the duty of valiant men is to take vengeance on their adversaries while they lived, whereas the opposite is a clear sign of weakness and self-distrust.²⁶ This is all the more remarkable, principally because the story of Ajax looks like a miniature version of the myth of the Seven against Thebes, which made visible and incarnate the idea that Athens is ever ready to pursue the justified claims of the weak in the fierce conflict between the Athenians and the Thebans over the burial of the Argive dead.²⁷ The original audience could hardly fail to appreciate the parallels between Ajax's proud boasts and the seven generals' arrogant blusters before the Theban walls; in particular, Ajax's haughty audacity is strongly reminiscent of

²⁵ On the political dimension of hero cult, see Seaford (1994a) 109–114.

²⁶ See Loraux (1986) 132–171; Hall (1989) 160–200; Mills (1997) 43–86.

²⁷ Cf. Mills (1997) 59.

Capaneus' swaggering overconfidence in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* 427–429, where the hero boasts that not even Zeus should stop him from conquering Thebes (427–429, θεοῦ τε γὰρ θέλοντος ἐκπέρσειν πόλιν/καὶ μὴ θέλοντός φησιν, οὐδὲ τὴν Διός/ἔριν πέδοι σκήψασαν ἐμποδῶν σχεθεῖν, 'for he says that he will sack the city, god willing or unwilling, and that not even the weapons of Zeus crashing down to earth will stand in his way or hold him back' transl. A.H. Sommerstein). Neither Ajax nor Capaneus think in accordance with their human status, and their pride exceeds what is acceptable for mortal men; Morwood goes so far as to suggest that Ajax's hubristic vaunts 'are borrowed from Aeschylus' portrait of one of the Seven against Thebes ..., not from anyone in the *Iliad*, a work in which the heroes positively value divine aid'.²⁸

It is moreover important to recognize that in the closing part of the play another basic tenet of Athenian democratic ideology is thrown into sharp relief by the Peloponnesian commanders' bitter indignation against Ajax. The Athenian notion that having many friends and allies is a further proof of a people's ethical integrity finds its application in the violent quarrel between the two great warriors of the Peloponnese, Agamemnon and Menelaus, and Teucer, Ajax's half-brother and brave representative of Athens, over the burial rights of the dead hero: Teucer's unbroke determination to counter the Spartan invectives speaks volumes about Ajax's moral worth.²⁹ Teucer is not the only *philos* Ajax can boast of in his terrific loneliness; in fact, after his fatal departure other sympathetic allies emerge, making every effort to keep him away from mortal danger. Though their efforts are unavailing, their indomitable force of will, together with their compassion for human suffering and respect for the protagonist, demonstrate that Ajax's heroic reputation can still enlist the sympathies of other men. In this great concluding struggle between vengeance and mercy, Sophocles presents Ajax to our view under a far more positive aspect than would have been possible in any other situation in which the besieged hero found himself without staunch supporters ever willing to confront abusive tale-tellers with their own affirmative narrational take on his life.

When the Messenger arrives from the Greek camp, he makes no secret of his friendly feelings towards Ajax's family and faithful Salaminian marines:

²⁸ Morwood (2008) 16.

²⁹ See Mills (1997) 63–66. On the importance of friendship in the play, see Blundell (1989a) 72–88 and 95–105.

ἄνδρες φίλοι, τὸ πρῶτον ἀγγεῖλαι θέλω,
 Τεύκρος πάρεστιν ἄρτι Μυσίων ἀπὸ
 κρημνῶν· μέσον δὲ προσμολῶν στρατήγιον
 κυδάζεται τοῖς πᾶσιν Ἀργείοις ὁμοῦ.
 στείχοντα γὰρ πρόσωθεν αὐτὸν ἐν κύκλῳ
 μαθόντες ἀμφέστησαν, εἴτ' ὀνειδέσιν
 ἤρασσον ἐνθεν κἄνθεν οὔτις ἔσθ' ὅς οὔ,
 τὸν τοῦ μανέντος κάπιβουλευτοῦ στρατῷ
 ξύναιμον ἀποκαλοῦντες, ὥς τ' οὐκ ἀρκέσοι
 τὸ μὴ οὐ πέτροισι πᾶς καταξανθεὶς θανεῖν·
 ὥστ' εἰς τοσοῦτον ἦλθον ὥστε καὶ χεροῖν
 κολεῶν ἐρυστὰ διεπεραιώθη ξίφη.
 λήγει δ' ἔρις δραμούσα τοῦ προσωτάτω
 ἀνδρῶν γερόντων ἐν ξυναλλαγῇ λόγου.
 ἀλλ' ἡμῖν Αἴας ποῦ 'στιν, ὥς φράσω τάδε;
 τοῖς κυρίοις γὰρ πάντα χρὴ δηλοῦν λόγον.

(719–734)

My friends, I wish first to announce that Teucer is here, just back from the hills of Mysia; and when he came to the command post in mid camp, he was reviled by all the Argives at once. As he approached they saw him from a distance, and stood around him in a circle; then every single man of them assailed him with taunts this way and that, calling him the brother of the madman who had plotted against the army, and declaring that they would not be content till he was dead, mangled to death with stones. And so it came to such a pass that swords were drawn from their sheaths and passed into men's hands. The wish to quarrel had run to the furthest point before it was arrested by the seniors with conciliatory words. But tell me where Ajax is, so that I can make this known to him! One must report every piece of news to those who are responsible.

Sent by Teucer himself to warn Ajax of Athena's retaliatory plan, he embarks on a detailed narrative of offstage action, placing strong emphasis on the unrelenting anger of the Greek commanders, who are unwavering in their determination to discipline Ajax most ruthlessly for his attempted crimes. He recounts how the Greek army assailed Teucer on his return to Troy from all sides with stinging rebukes; such was the fury of the crowd that no one kept a civil tongue, bent as they were on exacting the most severe capital punishment upon their former friend and ally, who in his divinely induced delusion wasted his revengeful fury upon the cattle-spoils of the Greek army. To soften the impact of the censure, he chooses to funnel all relevant narrative information into indirect speech (726–728). This is the first instance of the Messenger's narrational strategy of casting bitter reproaches and terrible threats against Ajax in *oratio obliqua*. Moreover, this is the first time in the play that the spectators become aware of the severity of the reprisal: in Athens death by stoning was considered an extremely cruel

punishment even for those who committed heinous crimes.³⁰ The reproof is extremely harsh and offensive for a hero of Ajax's considerable stature and reputation: the Greek chieftains call him a madman and a traitor (726). Although presented in indirect speech these accusations are no less terrible and insulting; but at least the Messenger manages to distance himself at one remove from this scathing criticism, while at the same offering vital information to help Ajax's friends and supporters.³¹

In his detailed report of Calchas' prophecy the distance grows significantly longer, as the Messenger nests all unfavourable stories about Ajax into a tertiary level of narration; this extensive employment of third-level nested narratives is unique in the surviving plays of Sophocles:

τοσοῦτον οἶδα καὶ παρῶν ἐτύγχανον.
 ἐκ γὰρ συνέδρου καὶ τυραννικοῦ κύκλου
 Κάλχας μεταστάς οἶος Ἀτρειδῶν δίχῃ,
 εἰς χεῖρα Τεύκρου δεξιᾶν φιλοφρόνως
 θεὸς εἶπε κάπεσκηψε παντοῖα τέχνη
 εἶρξαι κατ' ἡμᾶρ τοῦμφανές τὸ νῦν τόδε
 Αἴανθ' ὑπὸ σκηναῖσι μῆδ' ἀφέντ' ἔαν,
 εἰ ζῶντ' ἐκείνον εἰσιδεῖν θέλοι ποτέ.
 ἐλᾷ γὰρ αὐτὸν τήνδ' ἔθ' ἡμέραν μόνην
 διας Ἀθάνας μῆνις, ὥς ἔφη λέγων.
 τὰ γὰρ περισσὰ κἀνόνητα σώματα
 πίπτειν βαρεῖαις πρὸς θεῶν δυσπραξίαις
 ἔφασχ' ὁ μάντις, ὅστις ἀνθρώπου φύσιν
 βλαστῶν ἔπειτα μὴ κατ' ἀνθρώπον φρονῇ.
 κείνος δ' ἀπ' οἴκων εὐθύς ἐξορμώμενος
 ἄνους καλῶς λέγοντος ὑρέθη πατρός.
 ὁ μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸν ἐνέπει, "τέκνον, δορὶ
 βούλου κρατεῖν μέν, σὺν θεῷ δ' αἰεὶ κρατεῖν."
 ὁ δ' ὑψικόμπως κάφρόνως ἡμείψατο,
 "πάτερ, θεοὶς μὲν κἂν ὁ μῆδ' ὦν ὁμοῦ
 κράτος κατακτῆσαιτ'. ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ δίχῃ
 κείνων πέποιθα τοῦτ' ἐπισπάσειν κλέος."
 τοσόνδ' ἐκόμπει μῦθον. εἶτα δεῦτερον
 διας Ἀθάνας, ἡνίκ' ὀτρύνουσά νιν
 ἡὔδατ' ἐπ' ἐχθροῖς χεῖρα φοινίαν τρέπειν,
 τότε' ἀντιφωνεῖ δεινὸν ἄρρητόν τ' ἔπος,
 "ἄνασσα, τοῖς ἄλλοισιν Ἀργείων πέλας

³⁰ See also Bonner/Smith (1930) II.277, who argue that 'there is no indication that stoning was ever a legal punishment in Athens. The instances of community stoning mentioned can only be classified as lynching'.

³¹ On the use of direct and indirect speech in Greek tragedy, see principally Bers (1997) and esp. 49–55 on Sophocles' *Ajax*.

ἴστω, καθ' ἡμᾶς δ' οὐποτ' ἐνρήξει μάχη."
 τοιοῖσδέ τοι λόγοισιν ἀστεργή θεάς
 ἐκτήσατ' ὀργήν, οὐ κατ' ἀνθρῶπον φρονῶν.
 ἀλλ' εἴπερ ἔστι τῇδ' ἔθ' ἡμέρα, τάχ' ἂν
 γενοίμεθ' αὐτοῦ σὺν θεῶ σωτήριοι.
 τοσαῦθ' ὁ μάντις εἶφ'· ὁ δ' εὐθύς ἐξ ἔδρας
 πέμπει μέ σοι φέροντα τάσδ' ἐπιστολάς
 Τεύκρος φυλάσσειν. εἰ δ' ἀπεστερήμεθα,
 οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνὴρ κείνος, εἰ Κάλχας σοφός.

(748–783)

So much as this I know, since I was there. Calchas moved away on his own from the group assembled around the commanders, apart from the sons of Atreus, placed his hand in Teucer's in friendly fashion, and spoke, charging him by every means to keep Ajax in the hut during this present day and not to let him out, if he wished ever to see him alive. For the anger of divine Athena shall pursue him for this day only, so Calchas said. When men grow to a size too great for them, the prophet said, they are brought down by cruel misfortunes sent by the gods, yes, each one who has human nature but refuses to think only human thoughts. But he from the moment of his leaving home was found to be foolish when his father spoke well. "My son", his father said to him, "wish for triumph in battle, but wish to triumph always with a god's aid!" And he replied boastfully and stupidly, "Father, together with the gods even one who amounts to nothing may win victory; but I am confident that I can grasp this glory even without them." Such a boast as that he uttered; and a second time, when divine Athena urged him on and told him to direct his bloody hand against the enemy, he made answer with these dreadful and unspeakable words, "Queen, stand by the other Argives; where I am the enemy shall never break through." By such words as these he brought on himself the unappeasable anger of the goddess, through his more than mortal pride. But if he is still alive this day, perhaps with a god's help we may preserve him. So much the prophet said, and at once Teucer rose and sent me to take you these orders to observe. But if we are frustrated, that man is no more, if Calchas is a true prophet.

According to the Messenger, the prophet of the Greek army, Calchas, sprang forth as another friend of Ajax, warning Teucer that Athena's wrath would last only for one day and thus it was imperative to keep his half-brother inside his hut, lest disaster strike. Not unlike the Messenger, who openly declares his sympathy for Ajax's plight and tactfully mediates censorious comments through a triple-nested narrative recasting, Calchas is frightened for Ajax and chooses to distance himself from the Greek commanders by moving away from the livid mob to give Teucer a piece of friendly advice. He is, without doubt, one of those elders who earlier stepped in to reconcile the opposing parties (731–732), worried that the fierce wrangling between Teucer and the whole body of the Argives would turn out bloody, but his very serious words of warning and exhortations come too late for Ajax. He

is not, however, as reverential as the Messenger in his comments on Ajax's gloating swagger; as a matter of fact, he does not refrain from criticizing in the severest terms Ajax's boastful and thoughtless replies to his father, Telamon, and Athena (766, 770, 773). In order to strengthen his argument, he conveys the impious words of Ajax in *oratio recta* (767–769 and 774–775): the verbatim snatches of Ajax's speech reach the depth of a triple narrative embedding, for they are introduced into the primary narrative of the play through the Messenger's account into which they are imported through the cautionary tale of Calchas.

As has already been pointed out, the Messenger constantly views past events through the prisms of narrative gimmickry in order to take the edge off what is being reported about the brutal retaliation which is being planned by the irate Greek high command, thereby absolving himself from any moral responsibility for abusive remarks directed at the deluded protagonist. His narrative policy of including further levels of nesting within the reported dialogues allows us to catch the tones of a real religious fervour and devotion to a semi-divine man, whose fortitude and valour are in no way disfigured by haughtiness and irreverence; as a matter of fact, it is important not to overlook that in ancient Greece superior strength is valued more than pathetic piety, and in this respect Ajax is a shining example of a heroic magnitude of spirit. It is essential to emphasize that Ajax's irreverent words to Athena, purposefully cast in direct speech to produce the maximum emotional effect on the audience (774–775), hark back to his devout exhortation to Athena to stand beside him as an ally at the outset of the play (116–117, ... τοῦτο σοι δ' ἐφίεμαι, / τοιάνδ' αἶμι σύμμαχον παρεστάναι, 'And this I say to you, always stand by me and fight with me thus!'). Ironically enough, Ajax is at his most pious when he is delusional; Garvie is nonetheless right to argue that 'this is the real heroic Ajax', a man of outstanding strength and bravery, of unconquerable spirit and unimpeachable integrity. The sharp contrast between the Ajax of the Prologue and the Ajax of Calchas' story offers a valuable insight into the complex recesses of the human heart: this is an unrivalled instance of subtle and delicate portraiture of a man whose impious self-sufficiency is in no way an unredeemable failure in his personality, but rather an extreme symptom of his vehement passion and courage.³²

³² Cf. also Bowra (1944) 16–62; Knox (1979) 125–160; Winnington-Ingram (1980) 11–56; Segal (1981a) 109–151 and (1995) 16–25 with fascinating insights into the narrative structure of the play; Goldhill (1986) 180–198; Heath (1987) 165–208; Blundell (1989a) 60–105; March

Although we can only speculate as to the particular ways in which the ancient audience would have reacted to the Messenger's tale, which serves as an important prefiguration of the narratively complex final scene with Teucer, Menelaus, Agamemnon, and Odysseus, the Athenians would probably have seen in Ajax's passion-moving misfortune essential elements of the religious-political tradition of Attica.

As I have already noted, at the final stage of the play, as an *alter Ajax* Teucer raises an impenetrable shield of spiritual hardness to frustrate all attacks on his half-brother's name, while simultaneously struggling to avert the ignominious prospect of his body being left to rot. Though both Menelaus and Agamemnon disgorge a pent-up abusive narrative, partly told and partly foreshadowed in the messenger speech, as well as in the *parodos* (134–200), belittling Ajax's valorous deeds in battle against the Trojans and accusing him of insubordination, Teucer passionately recounts and reassesses the meaning of Ajax's magnificent exploits and achievements, thereby allowing the audience to consider the present crisis in relation to the past without calculations based on hostile rumours, clamour, and slander. Ajax is an eponymous hero of one of the ten Cleisthenic tribes in Athens and valiant protector of the Athenian fleet in the naval battle of Salamis (Hdt. 8.64 and Plut. *Them.* 15).³³ The considerable dynamics released when Menelaus, Agamemnon, and Teucer unearth stories about his life indicates what is at stake in the latter part of the play: the rehabilitation of an Athenian hero to his former glory after his systematic dismantling in the first part.

The question of his burial, evoking fundamental principles of the Athenian democratic tradition, together with a torrent of unconditional support for Ajax's moral fibre, add greater complexity to the picture of Eurysaces supplicating with his dead father's corpse. The narrative pattern of telling and retelling of Ajax's story from rival viewpoints, as well as the final reconciliation of Teucer and Odysseus, intensify his elevation to heroic status at the moment of his son's pious supplication. Not unlike Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, where the slow and painful progression of the protagonist to heroic glory energizes and vivifies crucial elements and protocols of

(1991–1993); Kirkwood (1994²) 101–110; Hesk (2003) 141–148 with further bibliography. See recently Scodel (2003); Barker (2004); Lawrence (2005); Instone (2007); Heath/Okell (2007); Nooter (2009).

³³ See Garvie (1998) 5–6; Finglass (2011) 46–51. Cf. also Stanford (1963²) ix. On the Athenian associations of Ajax, see Rose (1995).

fifth-century democratic ideology, Ajax attains *post mortem* greatness, when moral issues of the utmost importance for the Athenian audience—respect for the dead and succour to the helpless and the weak—are permanently settled and closed.³⁴ Anticipating Sophocles' last play, the finale of *Ajax* does not create too much difference; here, in view of Odysseus' conciliatory gesture, there is no suspenseful wait for the end that never achieves satisfaction. Ajax should be revered as a true Athenian hero: a chorus of friends and supporters, ranging from Tecmessa and the Salaminian sailors to the Messenger, Calchas, Teucer, and surprisingly even his former enemy Odysseus, leave the audience with a story in which, through a masterly management of viewpoint and narrative, horror eventually turns into honour for Ajax and Athens.

³⁴ On the similarities between *Ajax* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, see (e.g.) Seaford (1994a) 129–139 and 397–399; Budelmann (2000a) 244; Hesk (2003) 87; Markantonatos (2007) 200–201.

PART IV

IMAGE AND PERFORMANCE

(MIS)REPRESENTATIONS OF SOPHOCLES' PLAYS?

Jocelyn Penny Small

Even in earlier eras when scholars viewed most visual representations of classical drama as strictly dependent on the canonical texts, the plays of Sophocles seem to have received little attention.¹ Unlike Aeschylus and Euripides, he has only had articles, never a monograph, written about visual depictions of his plays. It is not just that so few of his plays have survived—we have the same number for Aeschylus—but also that what he wrote was apparently of little interest to artists. Moreover, when we do have images of his subjects, they tend either to antedate Sophocles' plays or to contradict substantially the texts we have. At the same time the few objects that may depict Sophoclean versions are poorly preserved or add little to what we already know about Sophocles. Nonetheless, these objects encompass many of the problems we face in understanding how art and text relate to each other. I briefly consider at least one attributed representation of each of Sophocles' extant plays and two examples from plays that have not survived. This survey is not meant to be all-inclusive for either the extant or lost plays. Note that the objects are primarily Southern Italian vases of the fourth century BC and Etruscan images of the Hellenistic period.

It is important at the outset to realize that, because we need texts to understand classical images, does not mean that they did in antiquity. I suspect that most then knew the myths in the same way we know, for instance, 'Little Red Riding Hood', one of the most widespread folktales in Europe and North America.² Most of us cannot remember where or when we first came across Little Red Riding Hood. Was it read to us? Or did we read it to ourselves? Why assume a text at all? Could it not have been someone just telling us the story? At least in this case, we can be sure it was not a Disney cartoon like *Sleeping Beauty*. No matter. We tend to agree on certain

¹ I am deeply grateful to Susan Woodford and H. Anne Weis for their comments and suggestions which have much improved this essay. (*Note:* Much of my essay depends on Small 1981 and Small 2003, both of which should be consulted for fuller discussions and bibliography for the topics here.)

² Zipes (1993²).

elements: child, red hood, forest, wolf, and grandmother. Most of us know versions where the wolf is bested, but we disagree on who and how. Was it a tailor, woodcutter, huntsman or someone else who freed Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother? The attraction of such tales is their very flexibility. James Thurber changed the tale by having Little Red Riding Hood whip out a gun to shoot the wolf. No one is offended by such a change in the story. In fact, that Thurber plugged in a very modern liberated little girl charms us.

The three great Athenian tragedians viewed their stories the same way as Thurber did Little Red Riding Hood. Each dramatist felt free to manipulate elements, including characters and plot, to produce variations of why and how particular events occurred. This malleability complicates the modern scholar's work. Since Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides (not to speak of a slew of other playwrights) often wrote plays on the same theme, such as the Theban Cycle, and with much the same cast of characters, it is often very difficult to decide which play is being represented in a given image, or even whether it is a play at all.

The issues of sources and transmission are compounded when images and texts are considered together. It is not just that texts are not readily available, especially during the period when most of the objects considered here were made; it is also that images did not actually accompany texts, as far as the extant evidence shows, until the middle of the Hellenistic period and even then they were rudimentary and occurred in scientific, not literary, works.³ The idea of *illustrating* text was not obvious, as it seems to us today, and took a very long time to develop.⁴ Remember that for most of the period under consideration here the actual 'display' of text itself ran the words together with few, if any, internal markings. If writers did not fully understand the possibilities of the written word during much of classical antiquity, then how can we expect artists to have leapfrogged over the writers to depict wondrous versions of those texts? The artists might depict something they saw in a performance—a kind of oral version of text—but were unlikely to illustrate a text when those texts had no provision of space for pictures. The texts and the objects were produced independently of each other. The closest we may come to "illustrated" texts occur on Hellenistic relief bowls, sometimes called 'Homeric' or 'Megarian' bowls in the earlier scholarly literature. Even on these objects the relationship between text

³ Small (1997) 41–47.

⁴ Small (2003) 172–176.

and image is often loose. They do, however, often include labelled figures and sometimes even the 'author's' name. They exemplify not so much texts with pictures as pictures with texts.⁵ Here I discuss two examples with Sophoclean connections.

Our task is further complicated because plays are both textual and oral throughout their existence. While the dramatist wrote down his play, most would have known the play primarily through performance. Today, however, most of us know the tragedies through reading them. The result is that we 'measure the accuracy' of an image by its resemblance to a text rather than to a performance. Artists, especially in the fourth century BC, were just as likely, if not more likely, to have seen a performance than to have had access to its text. Yet we know very little about actual performances. The physical stage, the props, not to speak of the styles of acting are all contested by scholars. Moreover, staging may have varied from place to place and over time. Does an image from southern Italy, then, reflect a local performance in the fourth century BC, its Athenian antecedent, or even a more recent Athenian revival? The variations in staging today lend a cautionary note to interpreting the images. In short, we have no established model against which to judge whether images show an actual performance, embellish on a memory of a performance, or 'merely' represent the plot of a particular play, known through attendance at the play itself, reading the text, or by hearsay. What about indications of an actual stage in the representation? Presumably such elements indicate a performance, but then we return to the question of which performance where and when, as well as whether the artist was striving for fidelity to an actual performance or merely the gist or idea of a performance.

Nor is our 'woe upon woe' quite finished. Each medium follows its own conventions, so that what may work in an actual performance or text will not necessarily work in an image. Does heroic nudity—common in images—automatically separate images from a theatrical source where actors are always clothed? Are 'extra' figures, not present in original performance, added to images for the sake of narrative clarity? Does the artist indicate when he is depicting a scene from a play from just any old scene? Does the presence of a 'messenger' indicate a play or just any old messenger who occurs in any retelling of the tale? The protagonist, whether in an epic version or a play, generally needs to learn crucial information from

⁵ I thank Susan Woodford for this elegant phrasing.

somebody. These are some of the issues that underlie any discussion of representations of plays and are particularly prominent in some of the images “based” on Sophocles’ plays.

Representations of the Theban Cycle in classical art may seem like a good place to start, since three of Sophocles’ seven extant plays are devoted to the subject. The problem is that we also have plays on the topic by Aeschylus and Euripides, as well as references to an earlier epic. Nor did literary reworkings cease after the classical era, for extensive treatments appear in Apollodorus, Diodorus Siculus, and Statius among others. In short, we do not lack textual treatments. Yet artistic examples are surprisingly few and our largest group was produced by the Etruscans. I grappled with this problem as a graduate student and came to the conclusion that the Etruscan anomaly was best explained by understanding how scholars worked.⁶

In the nineteenth century scholars had the gargantuan task of ordering and organizing classical art into stylistic and thematic groupings. Today we have the somewhat easier job of refining those categories, but the additional burden of understanding how our scholarly inheritance has affected our judgement. In particular, scholars assumed that if two unlabelled warriors were depicted in a duel, they must be Achilles and Hector. If a similar pair of warriors appeared in Etruscan art, they were identified as Eteocles and Polyneices. If two women were shown on either side of the duellers, the division continued with Achilles and Memnon flanked by their mothers Thetis and Eos respectively (Greek) or Eteocles and Polyneices with Jocasta and Antigone (Etruscan). In short, scholarly convention made the Trojan Cycle appear more important in Greek art and the Theban Cycle in Etruscan art.⁷ Unfortunately it is often impossible to tell in scenes without labels which duellers were intended, or even whether an entirely different set of warriors was meant. In the extant cases where the duellers are clearly labelled as the two brothers, the representations do not depend on Sophocles. Specifically, a Hellenistic relief bowl (No. 1) is certainly drawing on Euripides’ *Phoenissae* (845 ff.), since it shows Creon learning from Teiresias that his son, Menoeceus, must ‘devote’ himself if the Theban side is to win.⁸

⁶ Small (1981).

⁷ Small (1981) 108–111.

⁸ Each object discussed in the text is included in a numbered Checklist (*List of Representations*) at the end of the essay with further information about the object and references to photographs. Small (1981) 105–108.

Nonetheless, Etruscan art still preserves more objects related to the Theban Cycle than Greek art. Temple A from Pyrgi (No. 2) depicts the rare scene of Athena bringing 'immortality' to her favourite Tydeus who is portrayed at the moment he is biting into the head of Melanippus to eat his brains. At which point Athena naturally lets him die. Gory and intriguing as this scene is it is not Sophoclean. Similarly the relative burst of popularity of the Theban Cycle in Hellenistic Etruria owes nothing to the Sophocles plays we possess. At that time a terracotta pediment from Talamone (No. 3) depicted the end of the attack by the Seven on Thebes. Here the chariots of Adrastus and Amphiaraus fill the corners. In the centre Capaneus is storming up the ladder, while below him the two brothers have finished killing each other, as Oedipus, clearly blinded, is supported by a helper.

The original for this scene is generally attributed to the one reference we have to a painting of the Theban Cycle by a Greek artist, Onasias, in the Temple of Athena Areia at Plataea (Paus. 9.4.2). Today we are more hesitant to equate what has survived with extant references to famous artists or famous plays, even if neither the original artistic work nor the play has survived. We may illustrate the older assumption by reference to Etruscan art. The pediment from Talamone simply cannot be an original Etruscan creation, runs the argument, because Greek art is always better. Only Greeks made originals; the Etruscans and Romans could only copy. In fact, the dearth of Greek representations makes it just as likely that an Etruscan artist created the design for the pediment, which in turn provided the model for various excerpts and reworkings on late Etruscan funerary urns from the Etruscan centres of Volterra, Chiusi, Perugia, and Tarquinia. In any case, the presence of Oedipus at the death of his sons contradicts a significant element of Sophocles' plot, in which he is long gone from Thebes when the Seven attack.

The scholarly preconception that only Greeks can make originals is related in turn to the idea that every representation *must* depend on a text, and specifically on a famous drama. Yet we have little concrete evidence that the artists of the fifth and fourth centuries BC were portraying Athenian tragedies. In fact, in the one case where we know the sources for a painting, the Iliupersis in the Lesche of the Knidians at Delphi, recorded by Pausanias (10.25–31), we find that its painter, Polygnotus, relied on five different authors, as well as oral tradition and, significantly, himself.⁹ And, just as

⁹ Small (2003) 164–172.

remarkably, like the scholar today, Pausanias takes great delight in figuring out what those sources are. In short, it seems only logical that, if the playwrights could make up variants and interpret myths, so could visual artists. If Etruscan artists knew what they were borrowing—and there is abundant evidence that they did—they were also capable of making up their own variants, as has happened so often with Little Red Riding Hood.¹⁰ The emphasis we place on the idea of *the* original is modern and not ancient; artists did not feel compelled to depict scenes from plays and especially those from Sophocles, who appears to have been the least popular of the ‘big three’ in classical antiquity.

That said, one fragmentary Sicilian calyx-krater (No. 4) by the Capodarso Painter and dating to 350–325 BC certainly depicts a scene from the theatre and *may* depict Sophocles’ *Oedipus*. Six figures are preserved standing on a stage (note the supports for its floor) in front of and between four columns (another likely indication of a stage). On the far left, an old man bearded and hunched, with a staff and eyebrows slanting up toward each other, faces the viewer. To the right stand two little girls separated by another bearded man with his left hand on his hip and his right fingering his beard, as he looks toward the old man. On the far right behind the second girl stands a woman with her left hand wrapped in her mantle and raised to her face. The fragmentary scene is completed by a second adult woman with her back to the scene, but also with a similar gesture of concern with her right hand drawn to her face. The figures have been interpreted as the messenger or the old Corinthian (old man) revealing the truth about Oedipus (bearded man) with his daughters (Antigone and Ismene) and Jocasta completing the group. Yet according to Sophocles the daughters should not be present. The second adult woman is considered either as not part of the scene or, if a part of it, then as a servant, because we have no name to give her. Unfortunately, because of the preservation of this largish fragment, we simply cannot tell if the additional figures (daughters and possible servant) indicate another play or if they were thought artistically necessary to identify a scene without labels.

While the interpretation as Sophocles’ *Oedipus* is reasonable if not conclusive, the nature of the scene raises some interesting questions. It actually depicts a performance, and, as such, is one of the most static representations of a mythological scene. That is, visual renderings of myth tend to focus on action. A play, however, may *talk* about action, but most of that occurs

¹⁰ Small (1991/1992).

offstage. In other words, plays in and of themselves—even by the more popular Euripides—may not offer much to artists. Phylax plays with their slapstick are another matter and not of direct concern here, other than to note that such scenes also have clearly identifiable stages. Billing (2008, 239) questions the idea that dramas, when performed, are static, as I interpret the figures on this vase. While I agree with him that a performance should not be static, the visual representations we are able to associate with tragedy (and even later medieval illustrations of Roman comedy) portray figures delivering their lines with little physical action.¹¹ Hence either the artistic tradition is at variance with actual performances, or we must ask whether actors in classical antiquity were less “active” onstage than actors today.¹² Certainly we recognize major differences in acting style between early films and contemporary ones.

Scholars deciding whether this or that depiction ‘illustrates’ a particular play may be divided into two groups: strict and loose interpreters. I prefer this more neutral phrasing to ‘iconocentrists’ and ‘philodramatists’.¹³ The former believe that if an element in a representation contradicts a *significant* part of the plot, then it cannot illustrate that play. Hence if Sophocles sends Oedipus to Colonus, then a depiction (like the Talamone pediment) of the Seven against Thebes with Oedipus at Thebes at the end of the battle cannot be said to illustrate Sophocles. The loose constructionists—most recently exemplified by Oliver Taplin (2007)—maintain that any depiction whose understanding is enhanced by knowledge of the play in question is related to that play in some form (‘may’, ‘might’, ‘apparently’, ‘just possibly’, ‘evidently’, ‘arguably’, ‘plausibly’, ‘possibly, but far from definitely’ in Taplin’s words). I find that standard too broad to be of much use and also disparaging to the artist, who is not allowed any creativity.¹⁴

For example, we know that Sophocles wrote an *Andromeda*. The problem is that we do not know enough about Sophocles’ play to be able to tell if the depictions we have ‘illustrate’ or even refer to it loosely.¹⁵ In fact, the likelihood is against it, because the representations begin before Sophocles in the late sixth century BC, and the one point that is clear from the depictions—how Andromeda is exposed—is actually not known for Sophocles’ play. Moreover, Andromeda may be bound to stakes or to a cliff,

¹¹ Dodwell (2000) with illustrations *passim*.

¹² Compare Green (2008) 133.

¹³ Taplin (2007) 24.

¹⁴ Small (2003).

¹⁵ Small (2003) 40–42.

and the Darius Painter of the fourth century BC depicted her both ways. That the Darius Painter would show two different versions is no different from the dramatists writing more than one play about the same subject that contradict each other.¹⁶ In addition, scholarly arguments are often circular. Of all the possible plays about Andromeda, we know that both Sophocles and Euripides wrote at least two. The depictions we have are then divvied up between the two of them. And once that is done, we conclude that we now have a better idea of the lost play when nothing could be farther from the truth.

At this point let us broaden the discussion to consider some of the other examples sometimes related to Sophocles. Taplin, who is perhaps the most ardent of current supporters of a strong relationship between text and picture, discusses nine vases with a Sophoclean connection.¹⁷ While he does not claim that he has included all of the attributed examples for any particular playwright, nonetheless, he has chosen vases popular among scholars and 'plausibly' related to Sophocles. Yet of his group of nine, he eliminates two in his discussion. Of the remaining seven, he associates three with lost plays, which means that we have insufficient information to judge whether they are Sophoclean or not. Just as art judged to be of high quality is often attributed to Greek artists or at the very least Greek models, so the extant objects are assigned to the most famous playwright who wrote a play on the subject, as I have already mentioned. We are thus left with a total of four possible vases, of which I have already treated the best candidate by the Capodarso Painter. Of the remaining three, one (No. 5) is labelled 'Teiresias and a king, possibly related to Sophocles' *Oedipus* (*Tyrannus*) or *Antigone*, but not directly'. In short, only three of the nine are 'plausibly' related to Sophocles. A Lucanian bell-krater (No. 6) portrays three figures. The first of the two nude youths, on the left, offers a hydria to a woman on the right. The scene has been identified as Pylades and Orestes, with the urn purportedly containing his ashes, meeting Electra from Sophocles' *Electra*. The interpretation is reasonable, though I am not sure that the woman is anxious so much as pensive. She cradles her right arm in her left hand, as she raises her right hand to her chin. Billing remarks about another vase that actors would never appear nude.¹⁸ Therefore this hydria should not depend on Sophocles' play. Yet it is possible that an artist followed

¹⁶ Moret (1975) 263–264.

¹⁷ Taplin (2007) 88–107.

¹⁸ Billing (2008) 240.

Sophocles' version of the story—the fake urn—and adapted the figures to fit the conventions of art rather than of an actual performance. In other words, a particular depiction may be dependent on a tragedy for its 'concept', but not for its staging.

The other candidate, an Apulian calyx-krater (No. 7), is of higher quality and more complex. An old, white-haired, blind man sits in the middle of an altar flanked by two women with the one on the left somewhat more elaborately dressed. Behind her and slightly to our left, stands a bearded male figure holding a sceptre. He is complemented on the far right by a youth wearing a cloak and high-laced boots. Above him, half-reclining, is a winged female figure in similar boots and holding a sheathed sword in her left hand. Taplin, as well as others, interpret the scene as Oedipus at Colonus flanked by his daughters with Creon on the left and Polyneices on the right. The female figure is an Erinys. Like the vase by the Capodarso Painter, this representation is also relatively static in its action. The figures are posed in a virtual group portrait.

One of the vases (No. 8) Taplin discusses as Sophoclean, only to reject it, depicts Philoctetes. The subject became relatively popular in later art with appearances on Etruscan and Roman objects. The examples on the urns exemplify the problems of identifying specific literary sources for specific images. All three of the great tragedians wrote plays about Philoctetes. Nor did literary treatments cease after these 'definitive' treatments.¹⁹ The result, as with the Theban Cycle, is an abundance of textual sources. The urns (Nos. 9–10) show two different scenes: the initial encounter between the 'embassy' and Philoctetes on Lemnos, and the theft of Philoctetes' weapons. In both cases, Philoctetes is in the centre of the scene within a cave-like structure with trees on either side. In turn, he is flanked by two figures on each side. The two figures on the ends are typical, stock supernumeraries and, as such, do not affect the meaning; artists often filled in space with 'extras' who had not appeared in the plays or even in literary texts. Of the two figures closest to Philoctetes, the one on the left is bearded and wears a pilos—obviously Odysseus. The problem is identity of the other figure. If it is Diomedes, then it is not the Sophoclean version; if it is Neoptolemus, then it is. We simply cannot tell. The ambiguity may even help make a sale.

Similar to the problems with representations of Philoctetes are those that may relate to *Ajax* and *Trachiniae*. Representations of the suicide of Ajax go back to the sixth century BC, well before Sophocles' tragedy; likewise,

¹⁹ Pipili, *LIMC* 7, s.v. *Philoctetes* is an excellent guide.

representations of the story of Heracles, Deianeira, and Nessos begin in the seventh century.²⁰ Moreover, Heracles' death on the pyre also predates Sophocles. Even the one representation (No. 11) where Heracles receives the poisoned garment does not follow Sophocles, because it substitutes Deianeira for Lichas the herald.

Let us now turn to a fragment from a Hellenistic relief bowl (No. 12), which does provide us with one of the few 'secure' depictions of something from Sophocles. A small worn fragment shows the upper body of an old bearded man who stretches out his hands. The inscriptions are fragmentary, but the 'COΦO' has been reasonably interpreted as the first part of 'Sophokleous'. The action of the figure has led to the interpretation of Athamas as the old man about to receive into his care the infant Dionysus, whose initial Delta has survived. Unfortunately Sophocles' *Athamas* has not survived and the fragment does not tell us anything about what might have gone on in the play.

One unusual text that 'visually' describes a play possibly by Sophocles must be mentioned. Hero of Alexandria (*Περὶ Αὐτοματοποιητικῆς* II.20–30) writes about a stationary automaton that 'plays' a *Nauplius* in five scenes.²¹ Sophocles wrote two plays about Nauplius, and Marshall has argued that it is the *Nauplius Pyrkaeus*.²² As to be expected, problems abound. Hero lived in the first century AD. He is describing an automaton perhaps designed by Philon in the third century BC, representing a play possibly from the fifth century BC, since no playwright is mentioned in the text. Hero's own outline (22.3–6) focuses more on the changes of scenes and stage effects than on the play itself. For example, Hero describes the end of the play: 'and a fire was lit above the stage, as though it were the flame of the torch. And when the theatre was closed and opened again, the wreck of the ships appeared, and Ajax swimming; [and Athena] was lifted on the crane above the stage, and with a peal of thunder a lightning bolt fell in the theatre itself, upon the figure of Ajax, which disappeared'.²³ This description is perhaps not quite worthy of James Cameron's *Avatar* but remarkable for its period.

This brief survey leads to the following conclusions that apply generally to representations of plays in art. First and most importantly, the artists

²⁰ Shapiro (1994) 149–155 and 155–160 respectively; *LIMC* 4, s.v. *Herakles* Nos. 1674–1683, pp. 834–835.

²¹ Murphy (1995) 27–39.

²² Marshall (2003).

²³ Translation from Murphy (1995) 29.

resembled the dramatists in that they, too, freely invented their own variants. In turn, this means that the artists were like the dramatists also in ignoring the work of others. As the dramatists are *never* considered by scholars to be copying artists, so artists should not be considered to be *only* copying the dramatists. Just because *we* need texts to interpret visual representations does not mean that *they* did. This view implies that the artists were the equals of writers in representing myth. Next, if a significant contradiction of the plot of a text appears in a depiction, then we may conclude that the artist was not dependent on that text. At the same time, while obvious, we sometimes forget that different conventions and different constraints govern different media. And so artists may well depict their figures in heroic nudity, add supernumeraries, or depict actors standing passively to deliver their lines, all of which may not have occurred in actual performances. Therefore the representations must be used with caution as a source for our knowledge of actual performances. Similarly, the one representation that may depict the Sophocles' *Oedipus* probably depends just as much, if not more, on an actual performance than on an artist reading the text before making his image. We need *both* text and picture of the same play or text to understand how the two relate to each other: otherwise we are engaging in speculation. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, with the few examples for which we have both picture and text, the two diverge so much from each other that we must be extremely wary of assuming a given relationship. In short, Sophocles' plays remain the best evidence for Sophocles' plays.

List of Representations

Note: The objects are listed in the order they are discussed in the text. Only basic information about the objects (location, date, etc.) is given. The bibliography is limited to scholarly commentaries I discuss in my essay and to a couple of references with photographs in accessible places. All images from the web were accessed in January 2010. Starred objects are illustrated in this essay.

- *1. London, British Museum Vase G104 (1894,0516.1). Hellenistic relief bowl. Small, 1981, pl 44 fig. c.
2. Rome, Villa Giulia. From Pyrgi, Temple A. Clay. ca. 470–460 BC. Haynes 2000, 179 fig. 154. *Scienze dell'Antichità (Storia Archeologia Antropologia)* 10 (2000) 249–529 = nine articles on the Pyrgi pediment. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:PyrgiTheban.jpg> (colour).

3. Florence, Museo Nazionale Archeologico. From Talamone. Clay. Middle of the 2nd c. BC. *Temple and Tomb 2008*, 316 No. 293. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/sebastiagiralt/2355301058/> (colour).
- *4. Syracuse, Museo Archeologico Regionale "Paolo Orsi" 66557. From Syracuse, Necropoli dell'Osepdale Civile. Sicilian calyx-krater. Capodarso Painter. 350–325 BC. Trendall/Webster 1971, 66, 68–69 (blurry photographs but all the figures). *LIMC* 7, s.v. Oidipous No. 83 (with photo). Small 2003, 54–54, fig. 27 and 192n66 with bibliography. Taplin 2007, 90–92 No. 22 (colour). Billing 2008, 232 fig. 4 and 238–239 (discussion).
5. Basel, Anikenmuseum BS 473. Apulian oinochoe. Darius Painter. ca. 340–330 BC. *LIMC* 7, s.v. Oidipous No. 84 (with photo). Taplin 93 No. 23 (colour).
- *6. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum 689 (SK 195, 69). Lucanian bell-krater. Sydney Painter. ca. 360–350 BC. Trendall/Webster 1971, 66–67 (III. 2,5). Taplin 2007, 96–97 No. 25.
7. Melbourne, Geddes Collection A 5:8. Apulian calyx-krater. Close to the De Schulthess Painter. Taplin 2007, 100–102 No. 27 (colour).
8. Syracuse, Museo Archeologico Regionale "Paolo Orsi" 36319. Sicilian bell-krater. Dirce Painter. ca. 400–375 BC. *LIMC* 7, s.v. Philoktetes No. 56. Taplin 2007, 98–100 No. 26 (colour).
- *9. Volterra, Museo Guarnacci 332. Alabaster Etruscan funerary urn. ca. 150–100 BC. *LIMC* 7, s.v. Philoktetes No. 57. Brunn/Koerte (1870–1916) I pl. 69 No. 2.
- *10. Florence, Museo Archeologico 5765. From Volterra. *LIMC* s.v. Philoktetes No. 62 and Odysseus/Uthuze No. 38 (photo). Brunn/Koerte (1870–1916) I pl. 71 No. 5.
11. London, British Museum E370. From Nola. Attic red-figure pelike. Manner of the Washing Painter. ca. 440–430 BC. *LIMC* 4, s.v. Herakles No. 1680. Beazley Archive Database No. 215017 (photos).
12. Rome. Formerly in the collection of Ludwig Curtius. Now? Hellenistic relief bowl. 2nd c. BC. Weitzmann 1959, 82, 114, and fig. 90. Sinn 1979, 106 MB 43. *LIMC* II, 951 Athamas No. 2 with photograph.

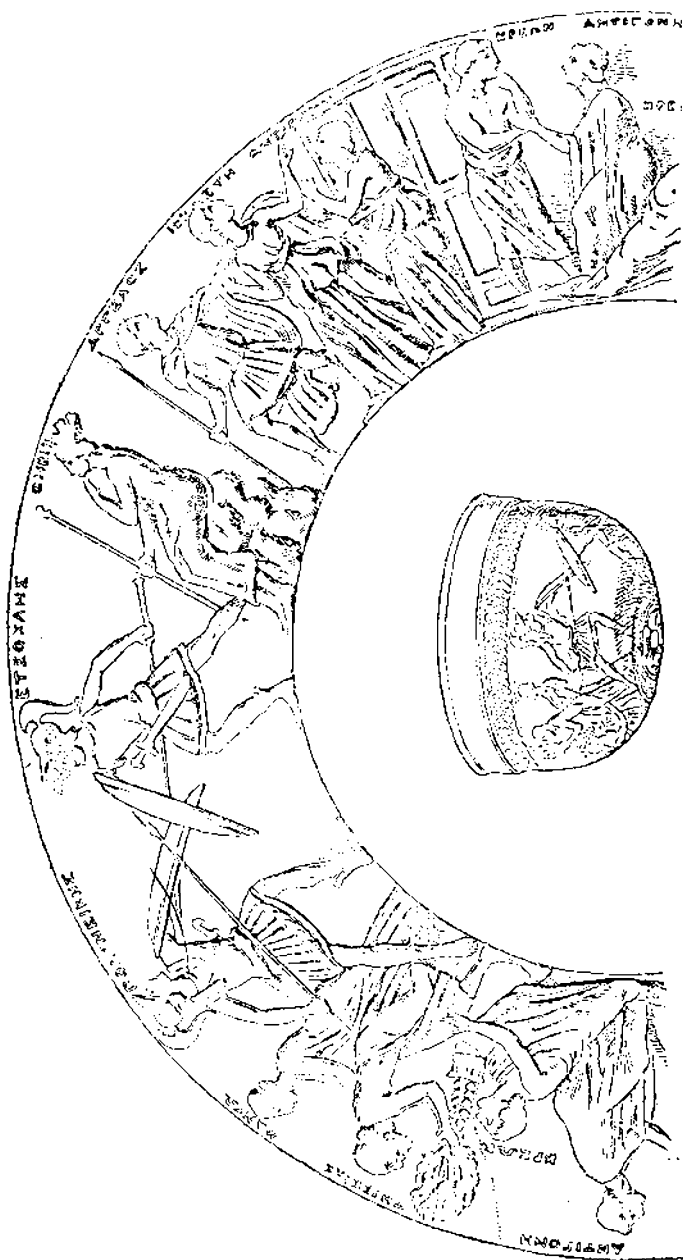


Figure 1. Eteocles and Polyneices. Hellenistic relief bowl. London, British Museum Vase G104 (1894.0516.1). Drawing after *JDAI* 23 (1908) pl. 6.



Figure 2. Oedipus. Sicilian calyx-krater. Capodarso Painter. 350–325 BC. Syracuse, Museo Archeologico Regionale “Paolo Orsi” 66557. From Syracuse, Necropoli dell’Osepdale Civile. Photograph: Museum.

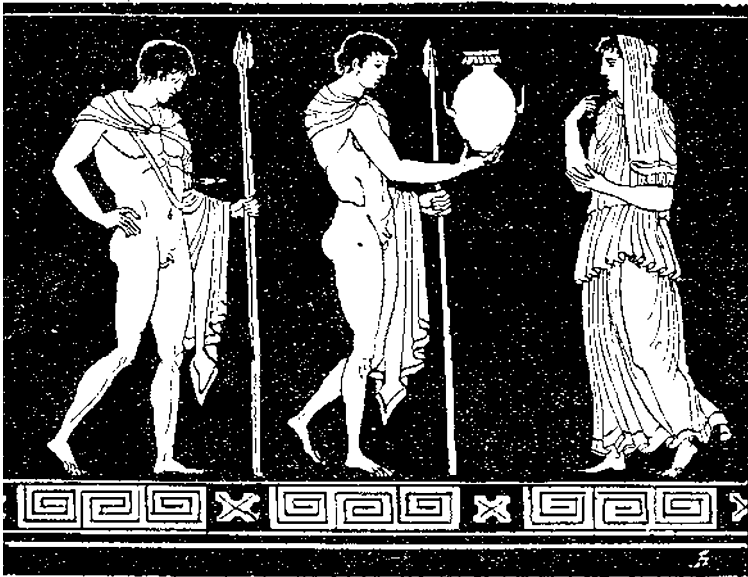


Figure 3. Pylades, Orestes, and Electra. Lucanian bell-krater. Sydney Painter. ca. 360–350 BC. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum 689 (SK 195, 69). Drawing after Séchan (1926), 143 fig. 44.

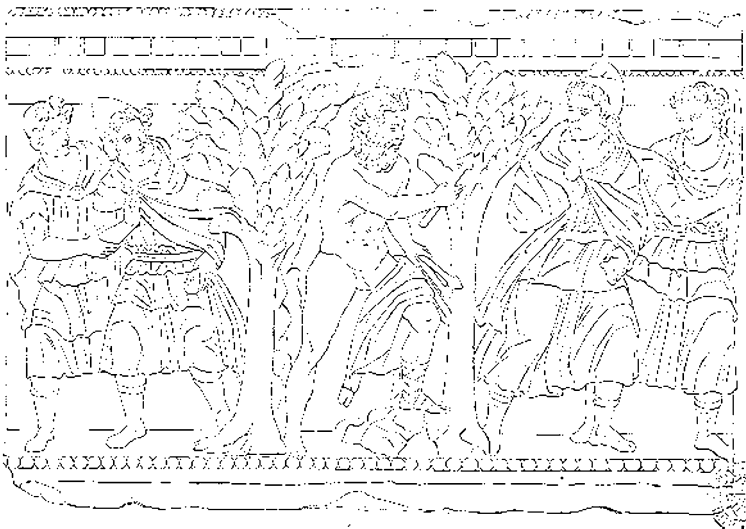


Figure 4. Philoctetes. Volterra, Museo Guarnacci 332. Alabaster Etruscan funerary urn. ca. 150–100 BC. Drawing after Brunn/Koerte (1870–1916) I pl. 69 No. 2.



Figure 5. Philoctetes, Florence, Museo Archeologico 5765. From Volterra. Drawing after Brunn/Koerte (1870–1916) I pl. 71 No. 5.

SOPHOCLEAN CHORUSES

Rachel Kitzingner

The chorus is the most difficult aspect of Greek tragedy for modern readers and audiences to appreciate. While the episodes, which involve action and dialogue between individual actors with occasional comment by the chorus-leader, can appear at least distantly connected to the modern theatre, the collective expression in dance and song in moments throughout the play by 12 or 15 masked figures who share a common, generic identity has left almost no trace in contemporary theatrical experience. And yet the chorus is widely accepted by scholars, starting with Aristotle, as the oldest part of the dramatic form that developed in the fifth century in Athens as tragedy. Some evidence for the central place of the chorus in the theatrical experience can be gleaned from the fact that the playwright who wished to put on a play at the City Dionysia 'requested a chorus', while the principal cost of a production was undertaken as a civic obligation by a wealthy citizen, the *choregos*, who provided funding specifically for the training and costuming of the chorus. A prize for the winning plays was given to the *choregos*, as well as to the playwright, and the *choregos* had the right to establish a monument commemorating his victory. And, indeed, there is some evidence that the chorus held a special interest for Sophocles.¹ So it is important for a reader of Sophoclean tragedy to find a way to make dramatic sense of these figures, who inhabit the stage for most of the play, exchanging comments with the protagonists in the episodes, singing and dancing odes between episodes, and occasionally joining in song with one of the protagonists.

Many scholars have theorized about the tragic choral voice in general. Although it is a risky thing to make generalizations about the role of the chorus across the three surviving playwrights, or even across the plays of any one of them, there are questions that can be asked of any chorus, and these questions help us to begin to sketch out ways of considering the chorus' role in any given play. Here are some of those questions: 1) The narrative

¹ The *Suda*'s entry on Sophocles claims that he wrote a treatise 'On the Chorus'; he also is credited, both in the *Suda* and in the *Vita Sophoclis*, with the expansion of the chorus from 12 to 15 members.

of a tragedy is usually situated in the mythical past, the protagonists being heroic or royal figures socially, politically, and circumstantially removed from the members of the audience, citizens of a democratic city-state. The chorus are a collective body of citizens or soldiers or old men or young or older women or slaves or foreigners who, both by their social or political identity and their collectivity, may seem much closer to the world of the audience and their democratic state than the protagonists.² How do these differences between the identities of protagonists and chorus affect the audience's reception of their words and actions? Do the audience, because of their affinity with the chorus, see the action through their eyes?³ 2) How much does the identity of the chorus, the 'character' that the playwright has given them, guide or limit what they say when they interact with the characters during the episodes or during their odes? How consistent with that identity are the content of the chorus' odes and the emotions that the chorus express?⁴ Does their characterization assimilate them to the role of the protagonist? What does Aristotle mean when he says that the chorus should participate in the action?⁵ 3) Song and dance, the dominant modes of choral expression, have their roots in earlier choral lyric, a genre whose performance happens largely in the context of religious ritual.⁶ To what degree does the performance of choral lyric in a tragedy evoke for the audience the traditional context for such performances and therefore bridge the gap between the fictional world of the drama and the ritual context of the festival in which the drama is performed?⁷ Do the ritual origins of their performance endow the chorus with a certain kind of authority?⁸ Or does the chorus' 'dramatic' identity, as slaves, for example, modify or subvert that ritual authority? 4) Song and dance in all its multiple forms in Greek culture through the fifth century was, to quote Helen Bacon, 'a principal means of

² See, especially, Gould (1996); Goldhill (1996).

³ The idea of the chorus as ideal spectator was first expressed by Schlegel (1846) 76–77. See also Calame (1999) for a recent discussion.

⁴ Gardiner (1987) discusses the chorus' identity as the most important factor in determining what they say and do.

⁵ Discussion of the chorus' integration with the action started with the statement in Aristotle (*Poet.* 1456a) that the chorus should 'συναγωνίζεσθαι' (share in the action). See Davidson (1986) for a discussion about how this claim has been interpreted, along with suggestions of his own.

⁶ See Goldhill (1996) 250–251, 253–254.

⁷ See Nagy (1984–1985) 48–50.

⁸ See Henrichs (1984–1985) for a discussion of choral self-referentiality and choral projection as a way of connecting the tragic chorus to other ritual performances in honour of Dionysus.

education and the medium through which mortals can relate to the gods and affirm and share with each other the values of their society.⁹ Does the playwright use this traditional form of education to voice his own particular point of view about the issues being played out in the drama? Does the chorus in this way become the 'voice of the poet'?¹⁰ Or does the poet compose the choral songs to express a traditional point of view, not necessarily endorsed by the poet and often in conflict with the individual points of view of the actors?¹¹ 5) What is the chorus' place, physically, in the theatre and how does its dance define that space? Do the protagonists act on a stage, while the chorus inhabit the orchestra, a space in between actors and audience? Or do actors and chorus share the same space, sometimes intermingling, sometimes ceding the space to each other? Are the patterns and movements of the choral dance mimetic of the words they sing and how does this combination of movement and words endow the acting space with a meaning that expands and enriches the site of the protagonists' actions?¹²

It is clear from these questions that the chorus is a complex dramatic form and that playwrights may have had different ways of using the chorus in the composition of each play. What is true of all choruses, however, is that they are never performing in only one register. Calame has described the chorus as having three principal dimensions: affective, ritual, and hermeneutic. In their expression of emotion (the affective dimension) and their enactment of ritual forms (the ritual dimension) they are particularly connected to the audience, for whom the performance of rituals is an activity of daily life and whose response to the drama they witness is, among other things, powerfully emotional. Inasmuch as the chorus' song also provides a larger context—background stories, mythological exempla, moral and ethical considerations (the hermeneutic dimension)—for the action, the choral voice echoes that of the author, both the 'ideal', all-knowing, virtual author and the 'biographical' author. Calame concludes that the 'polymorphism of the collective choral voice serves to explain how the chorus and the audience can react in the face of protagonists who occupy a different space and time, and engage in heroic action ... The interventions of the tragic *choreutai* engage in a real polyphony, in the Bakhtinian meaning

⁹ Bacon (1984–1985) 14.

¹⁰ See Rosenmeyer (1993) 563.

¹¹ Gould (1996) 232–233.

¹² See Wiles (1997) for a discussion of the mapping of the chorus' song and dance onto the performance space.

of the word'.¹³ Polymorphism and polyphony are, no doubt, universal traits of tragic choruses, as any attempt to answer the questions above for any given chorus would show. One must not look for consistency or unity in the chorus' role but rather see how the multiple registers in which the chorus perform move in and out of prominence at any given moment in the play. Within this context we must also ask how the interests, concerns, and commitments of Sophocles as a playwright shape his choruses in a particular way.

One of Sophocles' interests as a playwright is to explore the power and the limitations of human action and its relationship to the power and limitations of language. Anyone who has read (or seen) the *Oedipus Tyrannus* will recognize how the play enacts the tensions and questions that arise from a man's desire to take control of his world through his words and deeds. But in different ways one can see this preoccupation with *logos* (word) and *ergon* (act)¹⁴ in all the surviving plays. In exploring these questions, Sophocles is also, of course, exploring the nature of theatre itself, whose *drama* (thing done) is created onstage almost exclusively through the power of language. With these concerns in mind, we might imagine that Sophocles finds in the chorus a particularly powerful tool. As citizens or sailors or young women, they react to the protagonists as part of the same world, with the same assumptions about the nature of words and deeds. But as performers of song and dance, they exist in a different sphere of human action. By convention the chorus does not in the episodes initiate or perform actions that directly affect the course of the plot, although they react to and comment on what is happening.¹⁵ But when they sing and dance, they are performing another kind of action, using another kind of language.¹⁶ Through the movement of dance and the poetry of song, they translate action into a different form, one whose patterns and forms connect the human to the divine or natural order of things.¹⁷ In this way the Sophoclean chorus does act but

¹³ Calame (1999) 151.

¹⁴ This preoccupation was, of course, part of the general intellectual environment in the second half of the fifth century BC; for a discussion of Sophocles' interest in this question in *Philoctetes*, see Segal (1999) 333–340 and Podlecki (1966b).

¹⁵ Pöhlmann (1997) 1–10; Dale (1969) 210–211.

¹⁶ See Silk (1998) for a discussion of levels of intensity as a distinctive feature of choral language in tragedy.

¹⁷ See Mullen (1982) 72, 84, 88 for a description of the power of dance to evoke divine presence in Pindar's choral lyrics, and Lonsdale (1993) 43 for a comparative anthropological perspective; see Kitzinger (2007) for a discussion of the way the chorus' mode of expression, song and dance, is integral to their part in the drama, particularly in *Antigone* and *Philoctetes*.

not with the same assumptions about cause and effect, or about deliberation and intention, or about the effects of time as the actors'.¹⁸ Sophocles uses these different registers of the chorus' and actors' engagement to pose questions about what humans can hope to achieve when they speak and act. The protagonists' and the chorus' forms of action often create a kind of interpretive tension, so that the audience must negotiate between two different views of what *logos* and *ergon* can accomplish. In the rest of this paper I shall first illustrate briefly the way Sophoclean choruses in particular function within the playwright's overarching interest in the nature of word and action and then consider some other aspects of choral 'polymorphism'.

1. *Choral Action*

The language of the Chorus in *Ajax* may illustrate how Sophocles uses the chorus' song and dance to explore the nature of human action and language from a different perspective from that of the actors. *Ajax* centres on the question of how to value action, here epitomized in the great Ajax's achievement in fighting the Trojans. At the beginning of the play we learn that Ajax has set out in the night to kill the leaders of the Greek army, because they have chosen to award the dead Achilles' armour in recognition of the next-best fighter among the Greeks to Odysseus, not Ajax. As Ajax prepares to kill Menelaus, Agamemnon, and Odysseus, Athena sends him into a frenzy, and he slaughters the army's livestock instead. We learn later that she is punishing Ajax for his refusal to accept the help of the gods and for his reliance on his own strength (762–777). When Ajax regains his sanity and understands what he has done, he commits suicide, and the final scenes of the play dramatize the struggle of Ajax's brother Teucer to have Ajax's body buried with honour, in recognition of his heroic stature. In *Ajax* the Chorus is made up of Salaminian soldiers under the command of Ajax. As characters they are therefore totally dependent on Ajax. Their emotional reaction to Ajax's shaming and death is despair at the loss of his protection and the possibility of a return home that he provides. They are helpless without him. This helplessness and dependency is also the subject of their odes, so that, in this play, there is a very close relationship between the Chorus' identity in the episodes and what they sing and dance.

¹⁸ Bacon (1984–1985) 18 describes the particular nature of choral action in this way: 'ritual gestures, which are attempts to influence the action by involving the gods, are one of the most frequent forms of choral action'.

And yet, within this coherence between their character and the content of their song, this Chorus still create an alternative view of the world from the actors'; in their odes their 'passivity' is translated into a representation of a universal human condition of helplessness in the face of superior forces. In giving form to this idea they create a means of seeing the stage action from a different perspective. Ajax translates his defeat and helplessness into a final action—suicide—and Teucer and Odysseus together act to salvage the value of his life as a 'man of action' by persuading Menelaus and Agamemnon, who wish to obliterate his memory, to allow an honourable burial which commemorates his life. The Chorus, in contrast, give voice to their own and others' powerlessness before forces outside their control, and in so doing, their performance shows how actively to contain, give form to, and allow that powerlessness to exist as an inevitable part of the larger order of things.

In the space of this article I can only sketch how the Chorus' song achieves this translation. Initially, before the Chorus know for sure what Ajax has actually done, they know the (accurate) rumours that are circulating in the Greek camp. Their *parodos* captures and contains both the power of those rumours and the power of the gods as the sources of Ajax's condition, as well as the power of their fear; in the rhythms, sounds, and diction of their song (and presumably the pattern of their movement¹⁹), they give form to both the causes of their helplessness and the helplessness itself. The vulnerability of mortals in the face of a greater power takes on a form that allows the Chorus, and with them the audience, to escape or at least absorb that very helplessness. We can hear how song achieves this in the sounds, grammatical structures, images, and diction of the Chorus' language, although we cannot see how the pattern of their dance reinforces what the language achieves. For example, they grammatically equate the power of the words circulating in the Greek camp and a blow from Zeus: σέ δ' ὅταν πλὴγῇ Διὸς ἢ ζαμενῆς/λόγος ἐκ Δαναῶν κακόθρους ἐπιβῇ, (137–138) ('But when the stroke of Zeus or a violent rumour with evil voice from the Danaans attacks ...'), so that the lived experience of these very different forces has a single force and is part of the same pattern. They associate the fear that the power of Zeus or of human speech creates in them with an image from the natural

¹⁹ Throughout this paper it will be clear that our inability to determine the mimetic quality of the chorus' movement is a great barrier to fully understanding the impact of choral performance. For ideas about tragic dance, see Wiles (1997); Kernodle (1957–1958); Foley (2003) 10–11; Lonsdale (1993); Pickard-Cambridge (1968²) 246–257.

world that contains and distances that fear: 'I am alarmed and full of fear, like the eye of the winged dove (139–140)'. They capture the sound of the Greeks' malevolent chatter in another image from the natural world: παταγοῦσιν ἅτε πτηνῶν ἀγέλαι, 168 (note the repeated /p/, /t/, /g/, /n/ consonants), ('they chatter like a flock of birds') and thereby appropriate it into the form of their song. They address the talk in the Greek camp as μάτερ αἰσχύνας ἐμᾶς, 174 ('the mother of the shame I feel'), again absorbing this hostile assault into nature, into the cycle of birth. And a final example: a single line, 185, starts with a potential optative to suggest the possible cause of Ajax's trouble—ἦκοι γὰρ ἂν θεία νόσος ('a godsent sickness *might have come*')—and ends with an optative of wish—ἀλλ' ἀπερύκοι ... 'may [Zeus or Apollo] *avert*'), as they pray for divine intervention to stop the rumours. These two optatives at the beginning and end of the line capture and give formal structure to the uncertainty of the human condition in the face of greater powers balanced by the capacity of a wish, a prayer, to address that uncertainty.

There are three other moments which will, I think, illustrate the Chorus' translation of the helplessness they experience, and view as integral to the human condition, into a performance which offers a way to contain, absorb and transcend it. When Ajax threatens suicide and demands to be left alone in his tent, the Chorus, alone onstage, sing a song in the course of which they imagine Ajax's mother receiving the news of his condition (624–634). In this description of his mother's mourning, we must imagine that their song and their dance actually perform that mourning. The translation can give only a very pale idea of the power of the rhythms and sounds of the Greek:

ἦ που παλαιᾷ μὲν σύντροφος ἀμέρᾳ
 λευκῇ τε γήρᾳ μάτηρ νιν ὅταν νοσοῦντ'
 τα φρενοβόρως ἀκούσῃ,
 αἰλινον, αἰλινον
 οὐδ' οἰκτρᾶς γόνον ὄρνιθος ἀηδοῦς
 σχήσει δύσμορος, ἀλλ' ὀξυτόνους μὲν ᾠδᾶς
 θρηγνήσει, χερόπληκτοι δ'
 ἐν στέρνοισι πεσοῦνται
 δοῦποι καὶ πολιᾶς ἄμυγμα χαίτας.

Surely his mother, a companion of ancient days and
 white old age, when she hears that he is sick,
 his mind devoured, *ailinon*, *ailinon*, will not restrain herself from
 the cry of the piteous bird, the nightingale,
 but will mourn the high-pitched dirge,
 and the thuds of her striking hands will fall on her breasts,
 and the tearing of her grizzled hair.

By imagining Ajax's mother's grief and by performing it with their voices and, no doubt, gestures, they let the audience feel her helplessness—and their own—in a way which paradoxically counters it by assimilating it into the pattern, the form of their song and dance, which in its turn mimes the larger order of which human helplessness is a part.

In a mirroring moment, when Ajax has falsely reassured them that he plans to accept what has happened and live, the Chorus express their relief in a self-reflective description of their own dance (693–705):

ἔφριξ' ἔρωτι, περιχαρῆς δ' ἀνεπτάμαν.
 ἰὼ, ἰὼ, Πάν Πάν,
 ὦ Πάν Πάν ἀλίπλαγκτε, Κυλ-
 λανίας χιονοκτύπου
 πετραίας ἀπὸ δειράδος φάνηθ', ὦ
 θεῶν χοροποί' ἀναξ, ὅπως μοι
 Μύσια Κνώσι' ὀρ-
 χήματ' αὐτοδαῆ ξυνὼν ἰάψῃς.
 νῦν γὰρ ἐμοὶ μέλει χορεῦσαι.

I shudder with desire, and fly up full of joy!
 Io, io, Pan Pan
 O Pan, Pan wanderer over the sea, from the snow-beaten,
 rocky ridge of Cyllene, appear
 oh lord dance-maker of the gods, so that with me
 the Mysian and Cnosian dances
 self-taught you may put in motion! Now it is my wish to dance!

The feeling of joy, which stems from the anticipated restoration of Ajax to his proper place as their commander, takes the form of dance and song that mirrors it and enacts the harmony between their dance and the 'dance of the gods'. The Chorus' feeling is translated into sound and movement which is echoed in, and in tune with, the divine.

It is at this moment in the play that the tension between the Chorus' perspective and the actor's is most vividly captured. One hundred lines after this ode, we see Ajax choose to take the only action he can imagine as a response to his humiliation and his inability to bring retribution to the Atreides for cheating him of his *kleos*, his just recognition: he falls on his sword, asserting his own capacity to find a solution for himself, and asking the gods only to bear witness and report what he has done. His action not only makes a mockery of the Chorus' dance of joy but also calls into question the value of their performance in general. In one sentence he captures the contrast between his view of what counts and the Chorus': ἀλλ' οὐδὲν ἔργον ταῦτα θρηνεῖσθαι μάτην, 852 ('But a useless deed, worth nothing, this lament!')—or, one might add, (false) joy. And yet the Chorus'

performance of their hope establishes a possibility for the course of the action that complicates the audience's view of Ajax's subsequent denial of that possibility and his refusal of a human community not based on the recognition of his *kleos*.²⁰

The tension between Chorus and actors can be felt again in the song the Chorus sings as Tecmessa, Eurysaces, and Teucer prepare to battle Menelaus and Agamemnon over the burial of Ajax. Despairing of any end to the sufferings of war at Troy, now that Ajax is dead, they wish that the man who introduced war to the Greeks had never existed (1198–1204). When they specify the ruin he has brought to men, they sing:

κεῖνος γὰρ ἔπερσεν ἀνθρώπους.
 ἐκεῖνος οὐ στεφάνων οὐ-
 τε βαθειᾶν κυλίκων νεῖ-
 μεν ἐμοὶ τέρψιν ὀμιλεῖν,
 οὔτε γλυκὺν αὐλῶν ὄτοβον δυσ-
 μόρῳ, οὔτ' ἐννυχίαν τέρψιν ἰαύειν.

That man sacked mankind.
 That man arranged it that I would have no communion
 With the deep pleasure of garlands or drinking cups
 Nor with the sweet-sounding notes of the *auloi*,
 Nor, my ill fate, to spend all night in joy.

They then imagine being back in Greece, at Cape Sounion, and there addressing Athena. They articulate their despair that the power of war, the quintessential world of action, denies them the delights of the symposium, the world of song, and that wielding arms and fighting in Troy denies them the possibility of performing a hymn to Athena. The imagining and, in that imagining, the enactment of what they have lost and the momentary escape to a different world allow for an alternative to the single-minded determination of Ajax's—and all warriors'—action. It is only an imagining, and is sung in the context of utter helplessness, but it gives shape to a response to the constraints of necessity that differs from Ajax's suicide.

The tension I have tried to illustrate between the perspective the Chorus gains through their mode of expression and the actors' perspective is, I think, an element in all of Sophocles' plays, although it emerges differently

²⁰ These songs of false hope, which occur also in *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Trachiniae*, are usually seen as examples of Sophoclean irony (see, for example, Rosenmeyer 1977, 34–36 for this type of irony and *passim* for other types of irony in Sophoclean choruses) and are often understood as a way of undermining choral authority.

in each of them. It is, I would argue, an important aspect of Sophocles' desire to create drama which explores the richness and the limits of language and action. Sophocles constructs plays where the Chorus' inaction in relation to the *agon* of each play, often made believable by their 'identity' as people who would not be expected to take part in that action anyway, is complemented by their performance of a different kind of action in their dance and song, which offers the audience a different world.

2. Choral Identity²¹

The choice of what group any given chorus represent was entirely up to the playwright: the myth upon which he based his plot did not dictate the identity of the chorus. We will consider two factors that we can imagine affected Sophocles' choice of his choruses' identity: the desire to make the lack of agency of the chorus in relation to the action dramatically coherent, and the possibility of affecting the dynamic balance of power among the protagonists by aligning the chorus' sympathies with one or another of them.

Of his seven surviving plays, five of the choruses are made up of men (*Ajax*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Philoctetes*, *Oedipus at Colonus*), two of women (*Women of Trachiniae*, *Electra*). The men of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* are soldiers who are naturally subordinate to their commanders and cannot act independently. The men of *Antigone* are too old to fight and defend their country. The men of Colonus in *Oedipus at Colonus* are also old, but they are also the guardians of the grove of the Eumenides where the action takes place. They naturally, then, take on the role of making sure that the actions in the space are ritually correct, regulating others' actions to conform to their own rules (see below for further discussion). The Chorus of citizens in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, whose inaction might be the most difficult to motivate dramatically, are representative of a citizen body being devastated by a plague. In such a crisis they naturally turn to their leader to solve the problem, a tendency which the active citizens of fifth-century Athens would find believable, perhaps even familiar. It is safe to say that the non-participation of the female choruses in the action of the episodes needs

²¹ For choral identity in general, see Foley (2003) esp. 12–25 and a useful appendix with categories of choral identity for surviving plays and fragments. Gardiner (1987) provides an argument for the importance of choral character in developing an understanding of their role in the drama.

no motivation beyond their gender; even the female protagonists in these plays have to justify themselves when they decide, however reluctantly or forcefully, to take matters into their own hands.

Sophocles often explicitly marks the chorus' lack of agency in the episodes, where they interact with the actors as characters. He does this either by referring explicitly to a feature of their identity that motivates their inaction or by their display of a profound ignorance about the nature of human action, which may or may not arise naturally out of their character but is, in any case, absorbed within it. Let us look at some examples of the ways Sophocles takes great care to mark and motivate the chorus' lack of agency. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, when Oedipus asks the Chorus of old men of Colonus to give him shelter—the most significant action in the play—they say: 'It is enough for me that the rulers of this land sort out these things' (294–295). When, in *Antigone*, Creon asks the Chorus of old men to guard the body of Polyneices, to which he has refused burial, they say: 'Assign to some younger man to take up that burden!' (216). Later in the play he asks them directly to tell him what he should do, after Teiresias has predicted the disaster which will follow on his refusal to bury Polyneices. The Chorus says: 'Go to the girl and release her from her underground room; build a tomb for the one who lies exposed!' (1100–1101). Here is a moment where the Chorus displays a profound indifference to the nature of action. They do not present the two actions they describe, the release of Antigone and the burial of Polyneices, in a temporal sequence but use a '*men ... de ...*' construction, a way of balancing two things without establishing priority—something like the English expression 'on the one hand ... on the other ...' When Creon imposes a temporal sequence on the two, balanced acts, which he of course must do as an agent, he makes the wrong choice and buries Polyneices first. While he is performing the burial, Antigone commits suicide. The Chorus, as Creon's subordinates and as non-agents, need not be concerned with how actually to carry out the acts they propose. Creon, as an agent, must, however, make a choice.

It is interesting to see how this marking of non-agency becomes part of the chorus' identity in the plays where the chorus, as women, need no further motivation not to act. The young women who make up the Chorus in *Trachiniae* are drawn into the action at the moment when Deianeira understands that her position in Heracles' house is in danger of being usurped by Iole, the girl Heracles has sacked a city to gain possession of, and she consults with them about the action she is about to take: 'But if, with charms and with potions for Heracles, somehow I might get the better of this girl, the deed has been devised—unless I seem to be engaged in a wanton,

useless act! If you think so, I shall abandon it' (584–587). In response to this request, when the Chorus could, by their answer, become deeply implicated in the action, Sophocles employs his well-known skill in articulating ironic ambiguity. The Chorus answer: 'If there is any confidence in the "things being done", you seem in our view not to have planned badly' (588–589). The 'things being done' might refer either to Nessus' gift of the charm and his promise that it will make Deianeira secure in Heracles' affections, or to Deianeira's decision to use it. When Deianeira answers that her confidence is based on supposition not on trial, the Chorus again speaks with utter ambiguity. They say either: 'You must have knowledge, if you are going to act' or 'Knowledge comes only by acting' (592). The ambiguity of their response has allowed critics to interpret this moment in two very different ways:²² in one interpretation, the Chorus, by warning Deianeira not to act without knowledge, shows her culpability in proceeding with her plan; in the other interpretation, the Chorus' belief that one can only learn by action justifies Deianeira's attempt to secure her position in Heracles' house and averts any impulse in the audience to blame her. Surely, however, the Chorus' ambiguous language, coupled with their identity as young women of little experience and the choral role of non-participation, put all the burden on Deianeira as an agent, and at the same time illuminate, through their equivocal response, the complex moral and epistemological burden that she, as an agent, must take on but from which they are free. Their innocence as young women is enhanced by their separation, as a chorus, from the exigencies of agency.

In *Electra*, at the crucial moment of Clytaemestra's death offstage at the hands of her son, Orestes, Electra and the Chorus of older women are onstage 'translating' the action offstage to the audience. Electra stands at the door of the *skene*, the house, miming the murder within and shouting encouragement to her brother. As Clytaemestra dies, the Chorus sing the following lines: τελοῦσ' ἀραί· ζῶσιν οἱ/γὰς ὑπαὶ κείμενοι./παλῖρρυτον γὰρ αἶμ' ὑπεξαίρουσι τῶν κτανόντων/οἱ πάλαι θανόντες, 1418–1421 ('The curses finish their work! They live, those who lie beneath the earth. The blood of the killers, flowing in its turn, they drain, those who died long ago'). The moral complexity of the act the protagonists are performing²³ is vividly dramatized by Electra who visibly and vocally mimes the act on the empty stage, while

²² For a recent discussion of this passage, see Schwab (2006).

²³ See Kitzinger (1991) for a discussion of how Orestes' and Electra's use of language complicates the audience's ability to view the matricide as a moral act.

Orestes actually performs it in the house, away from the audience's vision. For the Chorus to 'join in' by ascribing the agency of this matricide to the 'curses' and 'the dead' distances them immediately from the complex problem of Orestes' and Electra's performance of the revenge. Unlike the Chorus of *Trachiniae*, they do not distance themselves from the act itself; indeed, inasmuch as their song joins Clytaemestra's, Electra's, and Orestes' speech, they are, at least vocally, participating in the action. But what they say is in a different register, a different world from the brutal reality of Orestes' and Electra's act. As a group of women their distance is not surprising; but insofar as their song pictures the act being performed by forces other than human agency, these women create a different dimension from which to view the action. Orestes may say equivocally of the murder: 'In the house all goes well, *if* Apollo prophesied well (1424–1425)'. But the Chorus say: 'A bloody hand drips from a sacrifice to Ares, nor can I find blame (1422–1423)'. These women, then, see things differently, and the audience takes in and reacts to what they say both as characters and as a chorus.

Who the chorus are also affects how they react to what the protagonists say and do. In this way they shape the audience's perception of the dynamics of power among the characters and the audience's reaction to the events of the play. In some plays the chorus' allegiance is established right from the start. The Chorus of *Electra*, for example, come onstage explicitly to support Electra. Once she has won them over to her point of view,²⁴ they are unwavering in their endorsement of her determination to avenge her father. Their songs, as we have seen above, offer a rationale for that action grounded in a belief in Justice, the Furies, and the demands of the dead. It is possible to imagine that their fierce and unquestioning endorsement of killings they do not perform actually raises questions in the minds of the audience about the justice of this action, especially as the gap widens between the killers' lies and inarticulacy and the Chorus' eloquence.

The Chorus of *Oedipus Tyrannus* also feels unswerving loyalty to Oedipus. Their belief in his ability to discover the murderer of Laius and save the city is matched by their refusal to accept the increasing evidence that Oedipus is that murderer.²⁵ Their trust in Oedipus gives him weight and credence as a character; for the audience it justifies the difficulty Oedipus himself has in coming to understand what he actually is. But the moment when

²⁴ Kitzinger (1991) 306–307.

²⁵ Cf. Vellacott (1967), who argues that the Chorus know from the shepherd's mention of his pierced ankles (line 1032) that Oedipus is the murderer.

Oedipus finally knows the truth and blinds himself marks the limit of the Chorus' loyalty to, and understanding of, him. They conclude from what has happened to Oedipus that a human life is equal to nothingness (1186–1188).²⁶ Their inability to see a value in what Oedipus has done to himself challenges the audience to see the significance of his action differently. As in *Electra*, the gap between the Chorus' feelings and the nature of the action obliges the audience to struggle to bring these multiple perspectives into some kind of order.

In *Oedipus at Colonus*, the Chorus initially also express horror at the presence of the polluted Oedipus and wish to expel him from the land. But once they have taken him under their protection, at the behest of Theseus, their unwavering sympathy for him supports and enhances the growing sense of Oedipus' extraordinary power. In this, the last play that Sophocles wrote, there is no gap between the Chorus' feelings and the trajectory of the action. As Oedipus moves to his miraculous transformation, the Chorus' ritual function (on which see below) helps to draw the audience into the belief that they are witnessing the creation of the hero cult which promises Athens' eternal protection. Lightning and thunder tell Oedipus that the moment of his death has come. It is the Chorus' reaction in song and dance to the lightning that makes the audience feel that something strange and wonderful is about to happen.

In *Antigone* and *Trachiniae*, where the action involves two protagonists in conflict with each other, the Chorus help to create a balance between them. In *Antigone*, the Chorus of old men who are advisors to Creon, would seem to be natural allies to Creon. But they consistently establish a distance between themselves and Creon's policies and, although they have no understanding of Antigone and are repeatedly hostile to her point of view, they sing a song with her as she mourns her own death, softening her isolation by at least giving her an audience. This Chorus' refusal to be aligned with either protagonist, by being critical of both, creates a kind of negative neutrality which is crucial to the balance that Sophocles creates between these two protagonists, and to his refusal to resolve the irreconcilable demands of their conflicting understanding of right action. In *Trachiniae* the Chorus link the world of Deianeira in the first part of the play to the world of Heracles in the second, although Deianeira and Heracles never share the stage themselves. Though, as young women, they have a natural affinity with

²⁶ Silk (1996b) 487–488 and (1998) 19–20 shows how the intensity of language in this ode gives it particular authority.

Deianeira and provide her with an essential audience, their songs also celebrate the hero Heracles in the first part of the play, balancing Deianeira's story with his. In their unquestioning enthusiasm for the hero, they establish a sense of who Heracles is, which compounds the complexity of his presence and what has happened to him, when he finally appears. Their songs carefully divide attention between Heracles and Deianeira and seem to create, for the audience, the possibility of a world which can contain them both. Here again the dissonance between the Chorus' vision of unity and the actors' stark division invites the audience to try and see how these worlds can coexist.

The chorus' gender, age, political or social position, their emotional reactions to the situation of the protagonists, and their perspective as non-agents, are integral to the action in the episodes. This identity coexists with, and is partially informed by, the chorus as performers of song and dance. We turn now to the ritual elements, the content and form of the poetry, and the choreography that make up that performance.

3. *Choral Performance: Ritual*

The chorus as performers of song and dance evoke a ritual tradition which connects both to the context in which the play is taking place, a festival to the god Dionysus, and to a long-lived tradition of ritual performance in many other contexts. Choral performance creates a connection also to the audience's own participation in ritual as part of their daily lives outside the theatre.²⁷ Their evocation of ritual, therefore, takes many forms and can be an explicit or implicit element in their performance and the effect that performance has on the audience. It can occupy the foreground or background of the action; it can take the audience away from the immediate situation onstage; offer a direct response to it; or indirectly evoke ritual as a social and religious construction that is part of the fabric of human response to the world. Easterling reminds us that ritual in the theatre is always metaphorical, as the drama itself is a fiction: 'What is represented in the theatre is both like and unlike the life it purports to imitate: like, in that it offers images of the "real world"; unlike, in that by definition it is make-believe'.²⁸ Metaphorical, yes, but, like all metaphors, varying in its closeness to the thing to which

²⁷ See Kowalzig (2007a) esp. 32–51, for a discussion, based in contemporary anthropological theory, of the role that the performance of ritual played in classical Greece.

²⁸ Easterling (1993a) 17.

it refers. The most 'realistic' and consistent way that the chorus performs a ritual is in its use of identifiable forms of ritual song and the accompanying movements of the dance, one presumes: cletic (summoning) hymns or hymns of praise, threnoi (songs of mourning), maenadic dance and song, and paeans (songs of victory), for example. And indeed even when their song does not take on an identifiable ritual form, the fact of their singing and dancing may always be linked in the audience's mind with ritual performance, perhaps especially the dances associated with the god Dionysus, in whose worship the play is performed, but also other choral performances in connection with initiation rites, funerals, sacrifices, weddings, etc.²⁹ These different mimetic registers of ritual performance had a varied effect on the audience, depending on the immediate context of the particular play and the particular moment in the play. But, as I have argued above, their performance, inasmuch as it is metaphorically or mimetically connected to other choral performances of ritual, of necessity represents a way of acting in the world through 'a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication',³⁰ where one of the primary features of that symbolic communication is to place the lives of individual humans within a larger order, be it divine, natural, moral, or societal. This mode of communication, then, by its very nature differs from the individual voices and actions of the actors.

Take, for example, the victory ode which the Chorus sing at the beginning of *Antigone*, celebrating the Theban victory over the Argive army. The song begins with an extended address to the sun, which recalls Pindar's ninth paean, and establishes a ritual form for the song.³¹ Even the alternation of lyric and anapaestic sections of the ode, with the latter possibly performed by the coryphaeus (leader of the chorus), may recall an early form of paean, involving a dialogue between the chorus and the chorus-leader. The chorus' use of this ritual form allows them to perform the victory, representing it as a divine act. Human agency is almost completely erased from their account of the battle.³² And yet, Polyneices' attack on his native land is the action which provides the basis for all that happens in the play. Similarly, at the end of the play, when Creon has departed to bury Polyneices and free Antigone, the Chorus sing a hymn to Dionysus, using all the features of that ritual form, to celebrate the god's imminent appearance as the

²⁹ See, for example, Henrichs (1984–1985) 75; Nagy (1984–1985); and, for ritual dance in particular, Lonsdale (1993) 6–9.

³⁰ Walter Burkert quoted in Nagy (1984–1985) 44.

³¹ Rutherford (1984–1985) 126–127.

³² Kitzinger (2008) 18–20.

saviour of his 'hometown'.³³ Although the events of the play that follow this song—Antigone's, Haemon's, and Eurydice's deaths—seem to call into question the effectiveness of the Chorus' evocation of the god,³⁴ it may be that the Chorus' appeal to Dionysus allows the audience to imagine that these events, which seem to entail the complete failure of human agency, are in fact the work of Dionysus' 'healing foot' (καθαρσίῳ ποδί, 1144), especially if, as the god of tragedy, he is the source of the play's cathartic effect on the audience.³⁵ The ode may, in fact, suggest to the audience a way of viewing the end of the play both within and beyond the human suffering it enacts.

These songs are explicit evocations of ritual forms of communication, which move the play into a different register, even as they are integrated into, and complicate, the dramatic situation. The formal structure of the great song to Colonus, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, 668–719, does not have the features of any particular ritual form. The song is a eulogy, a praise of Athens, as Antigone describes it, ὦ πλείστ' ἐπαίνοις εὐλογούμενον πέδον, 720 ('O land most praised in beautiful speeches'). But the Chorus' song, the description of Colonus as the home of Dionysus, Demeter and Persephone, the choruses of the Muses, Aphrodite, Zeus, Athena, and Poseidon—and the absence of any human inhabitants—performs the function of a ritual as it transforms the stage, and indeed the city itself beyond the moment of this dramatic performance, into a space both containing and transcending its historical and political reality, a place inhabited by man and god simultaneously, defined for this moment by the Chorus' capacity to make present the divine in the civic space by their song and dance.

The Chorus of *Oedipus at Colonus* is connected to ritual performance not just in the songs they perform but also at particular moments of the action. Most obviously, after Oedipus has entered the grove of the Eumenides, they prescribe a ritual of purification for which they give detailed instructions, the most detailed description of a ritual in extant Greek tragedy (466–492). This ritual is performed by Ismene offstage; the audience witnesses it only through the Chorus' words. It is impossible, I think, not to feel that

³³ Ditmars (1992) 155: 'The chorus sing a cletic hymn, a pure example of the genre, with no element missing and nothing extraneous to the form. The appeal for epiphany in a time of need, suggestive of ritual practice, follows an age-old pattern abundantly represented in the ode.'

³⁴ Henrichs (1984–1985) 77.

³⁵ Kitzinger (2008) 62–69; see also Calame (1999) 152 for a suggestion of how catharsis happens in the relationship of the audience to the chorus and the play as a whole.

the Chorus' careful description of each act to be performed, which marks their arbitrary but deeply significant power, is a self-conscious reference by Sophocles to the nature of dramatic performance itself. The Chorus directs Oedipus in the performance of an act which can only be effective if a community together accepts its authority to regulate their behaviour and to mediate between the human and divine world. In this one moment in Sophocles' last play, what the Chorus say and the drama itself are one and the same.

Later in the play they ensure the integrity of the ritual of supplication, when Creon arrives and threatens to remove Oedipus violently from his place of sanctuary, although he has been accepted by Theseus and the Chorus as a suppliant and is therefore protected by the formal ritual that has been enacted. Their encounter with Creon, in which they try physically to prevent Creon from seizing first Antigone and then Oedipus, has been called 'one of the most striking examples of violent action on stage in the whole of extant Greek Tragedy'.³⁶ And yet this violent action is highly formalized both vocally and, presumably, in its choreography. While the actual removal of Creon is achieved by Theseus' vocal threats in the following scene, the Chorus perform the ritual obligation of protecting the suppliant, transforming what would be mere physical violence, if the scene involved only actors, into an orchestrated movement which locates the city's power in its ability to perform and preserve the obligations of the ritual forms that regulate human interactions. As they say, while contemplating what it would mean for Creon to succeed in his violation of Oedipus' status as a suppliant, τάνδ' ἄρ' οὐκέτι νέμω πόλιν, 879 ('This then I no longer count a city!').

The Chorus' connection to ritual in *Oedipus at Colonus* is more explicit and varied than in any of Sophocles' other plays. Since the play enacts the transformation of Oedipus into a hero whose cult promises to protect Athens eternally, the association of the Chorus' performance with the performance of ritual harmonizes with the movement of the action in the episodes. In other plays the chorus' evocation of ritual in its performance introduces a register of action that complements, or at times conflicts with, the 'logic' of the episodes, where the actors assume that what they do shapes what happens. In this play the Chorus are citizens of Athens, enacting a ritual intended to keep the Athens of the audience safe.

³⁶ Burton (1980) 265.

4. *Choral Performance: Song and Dance*

In another register the chorus' performance resonates as an aesthetic experience, connected to, but independent of both the ritual implications of the song and older traditions of choral poetry.³⁷ The music of the *aulos* that accompanied their words and dance movement; the particular rhythms, sounds and intonations of the words (Greek had a pitch accent), sung in unison by 12—or 15—performers; the co-ordination of the sung rhythms with the movement of their feet;³⁸ the pattern of that movement, which gave physical expression to the song's images and intonations, all create an experience for the audience which intersects with the functions of the chorus we have described but also exists in a separate register, moving by sheer artistry the feelings and thoughts of the audience. Their song may be appropriate to the chorus' identity or may transcend it; the contrast in its mode of expression with the actors' speech may reflect a different way of looking at the world, which in turn may constitute part of the play's dynamic tension; the song may echo for the audience ritual performances in other contexts or may bring to the fore the ritual context of the theatrical performance itself. But none of this can happen if the song is not also an experience in and of itself, one that gains authority by its artistic power, its aesthetic impact.³⁹

Sophocles wrote, choreographed, and directed his choruses. He inherited a tradition of lyric poetry which gave him a number of metrical patterns,⁴⁰ which might create associations with particular moods, occasions, and even a particular gender of performer, as well as particular kinds of dance steps. As with the ritual forms we find in choruses, though, the dramatic context transforms these rhythms and sounds into a unique event, with a particular effect on the immediate context of the play, which may at times be to intensify what is happening onstage, or to change its rhythm, or to take the audience imaginatively away from the particular moment of the drama, in order to return them, informed by a different point of view, to the action. None of this can happen without Sophocles' skill as a composer.

The basic formal structure of choral songs which are not sung with a protagonist is the same in all three playwrights. The song is made up of one,

³⁷ Herington (1985) 123–138.

³⁸ David (2006) 215–269 for a discussion of the relationship of accent, metre, and dance step in lyric.

³⁹ See, for example, Silk (1998) for one way of understanding the impact of choral lyric from an analysis of language.

⁴⁰ Herington (1985) 111–124.

two, or three (and occasionally more) pairs of stanzas where the rhythm of each pair is identical. Sometimes the song ends with an *epode*, a stand-alone stanza. The rhythms of the words establish the movement of the dance, which might vary from a circular movement clockwise and then counterclockwise for each pair, or a movement forward and backward or side to side.⁴¹ David Wiles argues that the stanzas form a pair not only because of their identical rhythm but also because of a correspondence in diction and image. In this way the movement and poetry of the song might together help to endow the different directions in the acting space with symbolic significance, connected to the oppositions enacted in the play.⁴² Whether this stanzaic correspondence of themes and images can be shown to be true for all songs of the chorus or not, it is certainly the case that the poetry and movement of a song work together to create in the acting space, for the duration of the song's performance, a world within the world of the drama. The space, over the course of the play, is endowed with the cumulative impact of those worlds, which are interwoven with the words and actions of the episodes, sometimes expanding, sometimes focusing, sometimes opposing them.

Hugh Parry has described Sophoclean style in the following terms: 'Delicacy, subtlety, understatement, controlled excitement, carefully variegated surface texture ...'.⁴³ Let us look at one example of Sophoclean lyric to experience the power of choral song to create a world: In *Trachiniae*, Lichas, Heracles' messenger, confesses to Deianeira that the young girl he has just brought to the house as a captive is the woman Heracles sacked a city to possess and has now sent to live in the house with Deianeira. Upon hearing this news, the Chorus performs an ode about the power of Cypris (Aphrodite). The song has one strophic pair and an epode (497–530). In the first strophe they pass over Cypris' power over her fellow gods to focus on the battle Heracles and Acheloüs, a river god, fought to possess the young Deianeira. The final two lines of the strophe and the antistrophe, which correspond rhythmically, describe the entry into the 'battleground' of first Acheloüs and Heracles and then, at the end of the antistrophe, Cypris.

τίνες πάμπληκτα παγκόνιτά τ' ἐξ-/ῆλθον ἄεθλ' ἀγώνων;

(very literally)

Who the all-blows and all-dust struggles of contest entered?

⁴¹ Foley (2003) 10.

⁴² Wiles (1997) esp. 87–132.

⁴³ Parry (1978) 54.

We notice the striking alliteration of /p/ and /t/ sounds, the assonance of the alphas and the final omegas, the echoing of *ηλθ-* and *αεθλ-*, and the use of two *hapax legomena*: *πάμπληκτα* (all-blows) and *παγκόνιτα* (all-dust) to introduce the two combatants. The word order enmeshes the unnamed fighters stepping forth and the battle itself. The sounds and the diction create a charged aural and visual picture of the engagement the Chorus is about to narrate. The corresponding lines in the antistrophe are:

μόνα δ' εὐλεκτρος ἐν μέσῳ Κύπρις/βαβδονόμει ξυνούσα.

(very literally)

Alone of-the-beautiful-bed in the middle Kypris wields-the-rod, being together.

The first line is made up of four distinct phrases, each describing Cypris, ending with her name; the second line is two verbs: 'she umpires' and the final participle *ξυνούσα* (used of different forms of intercourse, including sexual), imbuing the whole with her sexual presence. The repeated sounds are liquids—/l/, /m/, /n/, /r/. The verb 'wields-the-rod' appears nowhere else in Greek. In contrast to the end of the strophe, the antistrophe pictures the contained, singular, fluid presence of Cypris, in the midst of, directing, but not part of the contest.

In between these two lines, in the antistrophe, is the description of the two combatants, Heracles and Acheloüs:

ὁ μὲν ἦν ποταμοῦ σθένος, ὑψίκερω τετραόρου
φάσμα ταύρου,
Ἄχελῶος ἀπ' Οἰνιαδᾶν, ὁ δὲ Βακχίας ἄπο
ἦλθε παλίντονα Θήβας
τόξα καὶ λόγχας ῥόπαλόν τε τινάσσων
παῖς Διός·

(again very literally)

On the one hand was the one, the strength of the river, apparition
Of a high-horned, the-strength-of-four-yoked bull,
Acheloüs from Oiniadai. On the other from Bacchic
He came, with taut, Thebes, bow and spears and club brandishing
Son of Zeus.

The description, balanced by a *men ... de ...* ('on the one hand ... on the other ...' or, more colloquially, 'in one corner ... in the other ...'), captures the difference between them. Acheloüs is described purely in nouns and adjectives: *ποταμοῦ σθένος*, 'the strength of the river', *ὑψίκερω τετραόρου φάσμα ταύρου*, 'the apparition of the high-horned, four-legged (the adjective actually conveys the strength of four-yoked-together animals) bull' and then his name and place. He is there (*ἦν*), he doesn't arrive. The description of Heracles

is a complex interweaving of where he comes from (Bacchic Thebes), his weapons (bow, spears, club), his coming, his brandishing his weapons, and finally his name: son of Zeus. Acheloüs, a god, is simply there in the form he has chosen to cloak his strength; Heracles' presence is a conglomeration of places, objects, actions, and lineage. These two stanzas vividly represent Heracles, Acheloüs and Aphrodite, each a distinct experience of image and sound, before the song goes on to recount the combat itself in the epode. The song does not narrate its conclusion, leaving the audience with the hero and the two gods captured in constant struggle, a formal way to picture the endlessness of desire.

At the beginning of the epode the Chorus sing the battle in a series of four phrases, each introduced by ἦν, 'there was ...'; we are being given a picture, full of movement but frozen into a single, static moment in time.

τότ' ἦν χερός, ἦν δὲ τό-
 ξων πάταγος,
 ταυρείων τ' ἀνάμιγδα κεράτων
 ἦν δ' ἀμφίπλεκτοι κλίμακες, ἦν δὲ μετώ-
 πων ὀλόεντα
 πλήγματα καὶ στόνος ἀμφοῖν.

(again very literally)

Then there was of blows, was of bows
 The clatter,
 And of bull's all-mixed-up horns.
 There were all-embracing wrestling holds, there were
 Of foreheads deadly blows and a cry from both.

The four phrases are divided into two metrical units which build in intensity as the phrasing of the double short rhythms lengthens. As Easterling says,⁴⁴ the main effect is noise, as the different stages of the contest succeed one another, all knit together with repeated metrical patterns, sounds, and words: hands, the bow, horns, wrestling holds, clashing of brows, cries.

Then the epode shifts abruptly to the fourth element in the contest, Deianeira on the far bank, waiting.

ἀ δ' εὐώπιδι ἀβρὰ
 τηλαυγεί παρ' ὄχθῳ
 ἦστο τὸν ὄν προσμμένουσ' ἀκοίταν.

She, beautiful-faced delicate
 On the far-away bank
 Sat, her—waiting—bed-fellow.

⁴⁴ Easterling (1982) 137.

The rhythm changes to a series of largely single short rhythms; she is given no name, only described as beautiful-faced and delicate, and then there is the far-away bank and she sits, waiting for the one, her bedfellow. The epode ends with the Chorus singing in the first person, looking at her waiting, likening her to a young calf without her mother.

The song creates an extraordinarily vivid world through sight, sound, even touch—Heracles and the river god engaging in noisy and violent contest; Aphrodite in the middle and above it all, directing; Deianeira far-removed, alone, waiting, and the Chorus calling attention to their power to make us see and feel, in the final simile where they self-consciously layer the picture they have created with another picture, of the calf abandoned suddenly by her mother. The stage, for the duration of the song, has been transformed into a vivid and unending moment of erotic contest out of time, which mirrors and informs the recent ‘contest’ Heracles has fought for Iole, and the implicit ‘contest’ between Iole and Deianeira, and the imminent contest between Deianeira and Heracles. The contests we experience on the stage in the episodes are human, even domestic struggles. The world the Chorus enacts in this song lets us see and feel Deianeira’s and Heracles’ struggle from a different perspective. The power of Sophocles’ words make us see, hear, feel, and touch a world connected to, but not in, the time and place of the action, where Aphrodite forever holds up her rod to orchestrate the battles of desire. And this world deepens and complicates the space in which Deianeira and Heracles act.

The chorus’ song and dance can take other forms besides these self-contained moments. Sophocles also experiments with songs shared between actors and chorus, songs where the corresponding strophes and antistrophes are divided by iambic dialogue, and songs where the actor sings and the chorus speaks. In the later plays, *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, he increasingly interweaves episodes with lyric shared between actor and audience.⁴⁵ The subject matter of the choral odes varies from hymns, threnodies, victory songs, to mythological narratives, pictures like the ode from *Trachiniae*, contemplative accounts of the human condition. Always, though, the worlds they create with their song and dance make the audience realize that there is another way of seeing, of experiencing the order of things, of understanding the human place in it. Without the chorus we see only one half of the picture.

⁴⁵ For the development in Sophocles’ use of the chorus over time, see Taplin (1984–1985) and Esposito (1996).

PART V

RELIGION, HISTORY, AND POLITICS

RITUAL IN SOPHOCLES*

Rush Rehm

To discuss the importance of ritual in Sophocles' tragedies, we need to appreciate the complex relationship between the ancient idea of ritual and what we understand (separately) as religion, myth, and politics. The task is further complicated because we use the term loosely now, applying it to almost any repeated action. Presidential elections, walking the dog, reading the newspaper, going on a diet, shopping, watching television, brushing one's teeth—such are today's 'rituals', despite their minimal relationship to tradition, divine power, rites of passage, or the sacred world beyond the profane.

Although no single ancient Greek term encompasses our word 'ritual', the following description captures the general meaning. Anthropologists define ritual as a culturally derived system of symbolic communication, involving practices repeated at regular (usually prescribed) intervals or on specific occasions (e.g. weddings and funerals) in essentially the same form, and whose presentation focuses on the success of the ritual rather than on some other (aesthetic, political, economic, or idiosyncratic) end.¹ Aesthetic elements certainly played their part in ancient Greek religious ritual (sacrificial display, the appearance and number of the animal victims, visual ornament, music, etc.), but they were not ends in themselves. Contemporary thinkers, following Durkheim, emphasize the importance of rituals in social formation, and this was certainly the case in fifth-century Athens. However, it seems that rituals then played their most significant role by offering a formalized way to seek assistance from, and render thanks to, the gods.

The formal pattern of ancient Greek religion demanded—in various ways and on various occasions—animal (blood) sacrifice, offerings (fruit, cereals, milk, honey, wine, etc.), prayers, hymns, choral dancing, and other

* It should be noted that all translations are my own.

¹ Adapted from Scullion (2002) 130–131, who usefully corrects the overly inclusive definition of Tambiah (1985) 128. For some conceptual problems with the idea of ritual, see Bell (1992) and Smith (1987) 100–117.

such activities, either singly or in combination.² These protocols sought to gain divine assistance by an exchange that pleased the gods. Other rituals tried to secure an understanding of the past, present, and future. Inductive divination involved the interpretation of natural signs, such as celestial phenomena (lightning, thunder, etc.), bird omens (ornithomancy), the appearance of the entrails of sacrificed animals (hieroscopy), the movement of flames in a fire (empyromancy), and so on. Following 'direct' contact with a god, inspired divination called for the interpretation of dreams (oneiromancy), of messages from the dead (necromancy), and of oracular pronouncements from Apollo's sanctuary at Delphi or Zeus's at Dodona.³ Thunder sent by Zeus signals the impending death and funeral rites of Oedipus (*OC* 1456–1485, 1500–1517, 1606–1612); Clytaemestra's nightmare leads to offerings at Apollo's altar and at Agamemnon's grave (*El.* 404–471, 634–659); Teiresias describes the disruption of his divinatory rites at Thebes (*Ant.* 999–1022); Deianeira and Heracles recount the interpretation of leaves at Dodona (*Trach.* 169–172, 1164–1174).

Rituals also marked rites of passage, such as birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, and death, usually understood as an ongoing (albeit temporally limited) process. Other ritual actions included placing oneself at the mercy of someone more powerful (supplication), celebrating a victory, offering hymns of praise, swearing a vow, taking an oath, uttering curses, and so forth. In these cases ritual participants usually called on a god (or gods) to witness, aid, or guarantee their actions.⁴ As Sophocles puts it, 'When an oath

² On prayers, sacrifice, and hymns, see Gould (2001) 216–226 (= Easterling/Muir 1985, 14–24) and Ogden (2007), especially the contributions of Furley, Bremmer, and Bendlin. Furley (p. 120) notes that animal sacrifice is not the focus of the ritual: 'the prayer is the *point* of the ritual; everything else goes toward giving this maximum emphasis and persuasiveness'. On cyclical as opposed to transitional rites, see Bremmer (1994) 4 and, generally, 38–54.

³ See Bonnechere in Ogden (2007) 150–156.

⁴ Supplication is discussed in a later section. Necromancy features in Clytaemestra's effort to placate the dead Agamemnon and Electra's counter-offerings and prayers (*El.* 404–471). Choruses sing hymns to Eros, and to Dionysus (*Ant.* 100–154, 781–780, 1115–1152); to Apollo, Artemis, and Dionysus (*Trach.* 207–224); to Earth and to sleep (*Phil.* 391–402, 827–731); to Pan, Apollo, and Zeus (*Aj.* 694–718). They pray to the sun (*Trach.* 94–103), to Hades, Persephone, Cerberus, the Furies, and Death (*OC* 1556–1578), to Zeus, Apollo, Athena, Artemis, Ares, and Dionysus (*OT* 150–215), to Zeus (*OT* 903–905). Ajax prays to Zeus (*Aj.* 387–391) and to Zeus, Hermes, the Furies, Helios, and various places (823–865); Deianeira prays to Zeus (*Trach.* 200–201, 303–306) and Heracles prays to Athena, Zeus, and Hades (1026–1043); Orestes calls on his native land and its gods (*El.* 67–72), and both Clytaemestra and Electra pray to Apollo (634–659, 1376–1383). When burying Polyneices, Creon and his men appeal to Hecate and Pluto (*Ant.* 1199–1200). Oedipus curses the murderer of Laius (*OT* 246–251); at Colonus he curses Creon (*OC* 864–870) and his own son Polyneices (1370–1396). Hyllus curses

has been added, one's mind/is more attentive, which guards against two things:/the reproach of friends and transgression against the gods' (fr. 472, *Oenomaus*).

Given that tragedy dramatizes crises and change (Aristotle's *peripeteia*, the 'turn' in a plot), it is hardly surprising that rituals figure so prominently.⁵ In a genre characterized by untimely ends, rituals associated with death and burial play a particularly important role. At the close of *Trachiniae*, for example, the dying Heracles arranges for his own cremation and funeral on Mount Oeta. The climax of *Electra* involves Clytaemestra's murder and the impending death of Aegisthus, along with the threat that he will *never* receive a proper funeral. A burial denied generates the action of *Antigone*, which combines the exposure of Polyneices' corpse with the entombment of the living Antigone. In *Ajax*, conflict over the protagonist's burial dominates the last half of the play. *Oedipus at Colonus* deals with the struggle to control the still-living Oedipus in order to secure the blessings that his presence will bring after he dies. The attention paid to Oedipus' funeral rites and the location of his grave in Athens demonstrates how ancient ritual brings together, religion, politics, and civic mythology.

To understand ritual in Sophocles, we need to keep the theatrical realities of his day in mind, given that play reading was, at best, a rare phenomenon. To this end, we will first consider the importance of sacred space, particularly as evoked in the theatre of Dionysus. We will then look at the interplay between ritual propriety and perversion; the uses to which Sophocles puts rituals of supplication and divination; and the way rituals exploit various temporal perspectives. We conclude by considering the possibility that fifth-century audiences viewed tragic choruses as a group of 'ritual performers' in their own right, beyond their role in any given tragedy.⁶

1. Sacred Space

To honour specific deities, the ancient Greeks would set aside a defined area (*temenos*, literally a 'cutting') as a sacred precinct or sanctuary. There,

his mother Deianeira (*Trach.* 807–812); Ajax prays that the Furies curse the Atreidae and the army (*Aj.* 839–844), and Teucer curses anyone who threatens Ajax's corpse (*Aj.* 1175–1179), later specifying the Atreidae (1389–1392). For the gods in Sophocles generally, see Budelmann (2000a) 133–194.

⁵ Arist. *Poet.* 1450b, 1452a–b.

⁶ Argued by Henrichs (1995) and Sourvinou-Inwood (2003) 50–53; considered suspect by Scullion (2002) and Gould (2001) 378–414 (= Silk 1996a, 217–243).

humans might honour the gods with offerings at the altar, and, in the case of important civic cults, 'house' an image of the god or goddess in a temple. Such was the case in the Athenian precinct of Dionysus Eleuthereus, home of the City Dionysia, the premiere festival for the performance of Attic tragedy, where Sophocles' plays were performed.

Sophocles frequently focuses on the physical relationship between his characters and such holy ground. The title character in *Electra*, for example, describes how her father Agamemnon wandered into the grove of Artemis and boasted of his prowess when he killed a stag sacred to the goddess (*El.* 563–572). For his trespass, Artemis required that Agamemnon sacrifice his daughter Iphigeneia in order for the Greek fleet to sail to Troy, a perversion of the ritual order far greater than Agamemnon's original violation. In *Philoctetes*, the famed archer violates the *temenos* of the nymph Chryse (*Phil.* 191–200, 1326–1328), and the goddess exacts her retribution through a snakebite that infects Philoctetes' leg. Marooned by the Greeks on the deserted island of Lemnos, Philoctetes is cut off from the rituals that bind him to society. These scenarios indicate the harsh repercussions that could befall mortals who transgressed sacred space.⁷

Nowhere does Sophocles exploit the proper placement of humans vis-à-vis the gods more than in *Oedipus at Colonus*. When the blind protagonist arrives at the sanctuary of the Eumenides, the Chorus persuades him to move to the spot least offensive to the irascible goddesses whose sacred grove he has violated. The Chorus then offers meticulous instructions regarding the libations and ritual purification that he must perform as a suppliant in order to gain asylum and the goddesses' protection (*OC* 466–506). The Chorus' concern for Oedipus' placement and purification anticipates the attention paid to his death ritual and resting place at the end of the play. No longer a pitiable beggar, Oedipus becomes a prophet-like figure who foresees the future and helps guarantee its outcome through his benedictions and curses. The Athenian soil where he dies becomes the site of a future hero cult,⁸ an example of the Greek capacity for 'sacralizing' space through ritual observance.

We find a similar process in *Ajax*, also involving the fate of the protagonist's corpse. Ajax announces that he will bathe by the seaside to remove

⁷ Such a transgression also occurs in Sophocles' lost *Ajax the Locrian*; see Fitzpatrick (2003) 243–259.

⁸ Oedipus' future cult establishes the 'cornerstone of modern criticism' for the play, according to Henrichs (1983) 94–95; see also Edmunds (1981) 221–238.

his pollution and bury the sword that Hector had given him, 'finding a place where no one has ever stepped' (μολών τε χώρον ἔνθ' ἄν ἀστιβῆ κίχῳ, 657). Sophocles helps suggest such a place by having the Chorus leave the theatre (one of only five times this happens in extant tragedy), ostensibly to search for Ajax. The scene shifts to a deserted beach, off-limits to normal human activity, not unlike the grove of the Eumenides in *Oedipus at Colonus*.⁹ Ajax appears alone, praying to the gods and cursing his enemies before he commits ritual-like suicide (*Aj.* 823–865).

After his death, Ajax' wife and son find his body and guard it as suppliants and as ritual observers of the dead (the boy holds locks of hair, a standard offering at a tomb, 1168–1181).¹⁰ Their actions convert the space around Ajax into an inviolable area, a process basic to the representation of sacred space in the Athenian theatre of Dionysus. Because the theatre had no permanent altar, for example, a moveable stage altar could represent a place of prayer and offerings when the action demanded it, as in *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Electra*.¹¹ In the case of Ajax, the treatment of his corpse anticipates his posthumous transformation into a 'real' Athenian hero, one honoured in civic cult.

Near the end of *Trachiniae*, the dying Heracles arranges for his own cremation and burial on Mount Oeta, a peak associated with his father, Zeus. (*Trach.* 1191–1202, 1252–1256). As the play closes, the Chorus bears Heracles' dying body towards the mountain, enacting the ritual *ekphora* ('bearing out') of a corpse to its grave. In a manner similar to *Ajax*, the procession from the theatre may point to Heracles' future status as a hero with an important cult on Mount Oeta.¹² These examples demonstrate the various ways Sophocles uses sacred space. Characters can create it by ritual activity and, in so doing, help provide ritual closure. The sacred area around a corpse can suggest future honours for the dead, while the violation of sacred ground brings divine punishment to the transgressor and his community.

⁹ Sophocles uses the same word, *νάπος* ('glade' or 'glen'), for the deserted beach where Ajax commits suicide (*Aj.* 892); for the sacred grove of the Eumenides (*OC* 157); and for 'the lofty wooded glens of Mt. Oeta', associated with Zeus and with Heracles' future hero cult (*Trach.* 436).

¹⁰ Burian (1972) 151–156.

¹¹ Sophocles' lost *Aechmalotides* (*The Captive Women*) and *Second Athamas* also may have required a stage altar. See Rehm (1988).

¹² For contrasting views on the anticipation of Heracles' hero cult (and his apotheosis to Olympus), see Rehm (1994) 80–83 with notes.

2. *Ritual Propriety and Perversion*

Greek religious ritual required—and in a significant sense *was*—a series of detailed observances in a prescribed sequence, aimed at pleasing the divine powers for whom the ritual was intended. The protocols might include the removal of impurities, the preparation of offerings (blood sacrifice could specify animals of a certain kind, colour, and appearance), the performance of prayers, hymns, and choruses, and so on.¹³ Time and again tragic characters strive to get the ritual details ‘right,’ because something amiss might offend the gods and undermine the outcome.¹⁴

Maintaining proper form in ritual, however, did not guarantee propriety or success. Although Greek religion privileged practice over theology and faith, the impropriety could arise from the *person* making the appeal or the offering and not simply from some technical failure. In *Electra*, for example, a nightmare involving her murdered husband haunts Clytaemestra, and she sends her daughter Chrysothemis to Agamemnon’s tomb with offerings to calm his spirit. Electra considers her mother’s necromantic ritual a sacrilege: ‘It is neither right/nor holy to place offerings or bring libations/for my father from that woman’ (*El.* 432–434). Not the offerings *per se*, but the person who sends them offends Electra, and she proposes counter-offerings of her and Chrysothemis’ hair, as well as the girdle that she had saved for her wedding.¹⁵ These meagre gifts will count for more in their dead father’s estimation than the ritual pourings from his murderous wife (439–463).

We may contrast Electra’s sense of outrage at her mother’s offerings with Clytaemestra’s own sense of ritual perversion in Agamemnon’s sacrifice of their daughter Iphigeneia: ‘This father of yours ...,/alone of the Greeks, dared to sacrifice to the gods/your own sister. He felt nowhere near the pain in spawning her/that I felt in giving her birth’ (*El.* 530–533). As a mark of Clytaemestra’s disdain for her husband, she holds a monthly festival, including sacrifice and dancing (277–281), honouring the day that she killed him. Agamemnon’s corrupt sacrifice of Iphigeneia generates a series of faux-funeral rituals arranged by his wife, celebrating not the dead man but his *murder*.

¹³ On ritual propriety, see Bendlin in Ogden (2007) 178–189; Gould (2001) 203–234 (= Easterling/Muir 1985, 1–33); Mikalson (1983) 68–70 and 84–85; Parke (1977) 18–19 and 127–128.

¹⁴ See, for example, Eur. *Ion* 1187–1208; or, as noted above, Soph. *OC* 466–506.

¹⁵ Orestes leaves milk, flowers, and a lock of hair at Agamemnon’s tomb (*El.* 894–901); other tomb offerings might include incense, wreaths, ribbons tied to the tombstone, liquid offerings, small vases, etc. See Rehm (1994) 27–29 with notes.

Rituals for the dead also play an important role in the recognition of Electra and her brother, Orestes, and in their plot to avenge their father. A joyful Chrysothemis returns from Agamemnon's grave, having found the tomb covered with flowers and other offerings, which she interprets (correctly) as belated funeral gifts from Orestes (*El.* 885–919). However, Electra dismisses her sister's jubilation, misled by the false report of Orestes' death at the Delphic games. Ritual propriety operates even in this fabrication, for the Delphians cremate Orestes' mangled body on the spot and place his ashes in a bronze urn to be sent to his home in Mycenae (755–760). This appropriate ritual response—burning a disfigured corpse and having the ashes buried by the family—serves the murder plot, for it explains why no identifiable body is brought back to the palace. Instead, Orestes and Pylades return incognito with the funeral urn ostensibly containing Orestes' ashes. Electra's ritual lamentation over the empty urn forces her brother to reveal his identity, and her exaltation that follows threatens to undermine his plan for vengeance.

Ritual confusion in *Electra* takes a further turn after Orestes slays his mother Clytaemestra and is on the verge of killing Aegisthus. At that moment Electra unleashes a tirade against the tyrant she hates, urging Orestes to deny Aegisthus proper burial by throwing his corpse to the animals: 'Kill him at once, and once he's dead, set him out/for the buriers he deserves to happen upon,/far from our sight. This alone will offer me/release from my past suffering' (*El.* 1487–1490). By drawing together various aspects of death ritual, Sophocles conveys the emotional torture experienced by his heroine: the funerary rites that Electra mistakenly offers for the still-living give way to her denial of funeral rites for the soon-to-die.

In *Antigone* Sophocles provides *the* tragic paradigm for the confusion of the quick and the dead. Creon's exposure of Polyneices' corpse and his entombment of the living Antigone offends the gods and leads to disaster, as Teiresias makes clear:

You have sent below one who belongs above,
lodging a living soul dishonourably in a tomb,
and you have kept here one who belongs below, against
the gods—a dispossessed, un-mourned, unholy corpse. (*Ant.* 1068–1071)

Although Creon isolates Polyneices' corpse from the human community (both above and below the ground), the contagion of his body will not stay put. In graphically material form it pollutes the city's sacred spaces, cutting Thebes off from its traditional access to the Olympian gods (999–1022).

Once convinced of his error, Creon desperately tries to restore ritual order, honouring Polyneices with full burial rites (*Ant.* 1196–1204) and releasing Antigone from her living grave. However, he arrives too late, after his niece has hanged herself with her veil (σινδόνης, 1222), a garment associated with the ‘unveiling’ ceremony (*anacalypteria*) during the Greek wedding ritual.¹⁶ In the cave Creon also comes upon his son Haemon, who vainly stabs at his father before turning the sword on himself:

He embraces the maiden softly in his arms
and, panting for breath, releases a sharp gush
as drops of blood fall on her pale cheek.
He lies there, a corpse holding a corpse, having fulfilled
his marriage rites, poor wretch, in the house of Hades. (1237–1241)

Haemon’s suicide presents a macabre version of the wedding night that he and Antigone will never have, part of the play’s interweaving of marriage and funeral rites.¹⁷ The morbid intimacy of their corpses recalls Antigone’s earlier monody, which joins the wedding hymn she will never know with the funeral lament for her own, otherwise un-mourned, death:

Hades, who lulls all to sleep,
leads me still living
to the shore of Acheron
without the marriage
I was due, nor is any wedding
hymn hymned for me,
for I will be the bride of Acheron. (*Ant.* 810–816)

Ritual confusion continues after the deaths of Antigone and Haemon. Despairing at her son’s suicide, Creon’s wife kills herself on the altar of Zeus *Herkeios* (‘of the courtyard’), a perverted sacrifice that stains with her maternal blood the symbolic heart of the household (*Ant.* 1282–1316). When Eurydice’s dead body appears from inside the house, Sophocles offers a domestic version of the display of Polyneices’ body on the Theban plain, one polluting the home, the other the entire city.

We learn of another son, Megareus, whose death Eurydice also blames on Creon ‘the child killer’ (τῷ παιδοκτόνῳ, *Ant.* 1305). Dramatized in Euripides’ *Phoenissae* (although there he is called Menoeceus), the ritual sacrifice of the boy saves Thebes from the Argive invasion. In Eurydice’s maternal grief,

¹⁶ Also alluded to at *El.* 1466–1478 and *Trach.* 1078–1079; see Rehm (1994) 14–17, 64, 78–79, and 141–142.

¹⁷ See Rehm (1994) 62–65.

'lamenting ... the empty bed of Megareus' (κωκύσσασα ... κενὸν λέχος, 1302–1303), Sophocles recalls Antigone 'crying out a lament [ἀνακωκύει] ... /like a bird who sees the bed [λέχος]/of her empty [κενή] nest, orphaned of her nestlings' (423–425). With their lonely beds and lost children, these mourning rituals—Antigone's for her brother, Eurydice's for her son—also suggest the non-wedding of Haemon and Antigone, and the broken marriage of Creon and his now-dead wife. By confusing the living and the dead, Creon unleashes a devastating series of maimed rituals that conflate funereal, nuptial, and sacrificial rites.

Ritual disruption also informs *Trachiniae*, but the prospect of a wedding and a funeral restores a sense of order by the play's end. Describing her troubled life, Deianeira uses a rich aggregation of images associated with wedding rites, linking her near-rape by the river god Acheloüs to her marriage with Heracles (*Trach.* 6–35, 144–153). On Deianeira and Heracles' journey home, the centaur Nessus offers to carry her across the river Evenus, but he then attempts to rape her. Fatally wounded by Heracles' arrow, the dying centaur gives Deianeira a potion of his own blood, claiming it will reignite Heracles' passion should it ever stray. Her exchange with this beast-man takes place in the middle of the river (555–581), suggesting the dangerous 'betwixt and between' period in a rite of passage.¹⁸ Years later, Deianeira employs the drug on Heracles when he returns from war besotted with his captive princess, Iole. The love potion proves incendiary, and Heracles' immolation leads to Deianeira's suicide, a dramatic *peripeteia* that merges *eros*, *thanatos*, weddings, and funerals.¹⁹ Sophocles offers some ritual closure, however, when Heracles arranges for his own funeral and for the wedding of his son Hyllus to Iole (1193–1251). In *Trachiniae*, Sophocles uses ritual confusion, perversion, and restoration to explore the conflict between destiny and choice, passion and wisdom, men and women, continuity and change.

3. *Divination, Dreams, Oracles: Reading the Signs*

Time and again we see tragic characters—and the communities they represent—striving to learn from the gods about the past and the future.²⁰ In

¹⁸ See van Genneep (1960; orig. 1909); Turner (1977; orig. 1969) 94–97, 106–113, 165–203, and (1982) 26–28 and 201–218.

¹⁹ See Rehm (1994) 72–83.

²⁰ For prophecy in *Philoctetes*, see Budelmann (2000a) 119–130; for the Theban cycle, see Bushnell (1988).

Antigone the seer Teiresias explains that prayers and sacrifice can no longer reach the gods, and that divine communication through bird omens (ornithomancy) has become garbled and ineffective. Instead of readable signs, he hears the 'not unintelligible whirling of wings' and the 'barbaric shrieking' of birds, which means they 'are tearing at each other with murderous talons'. Burnt offerings abort, and Teiresias can read neither the flames (empyromancy) nor the sacrificial entrails (hieroscopy). He understands that carrion from Polyneices' body, spread by dogs and birds, has polluted the sacred altars of the city, leading to the 'ruin of these prophetic rites' (*Ant.* 999–1022, 1081–1083). Only the reversal of Creon's decree, which exposed Polyneices' corpse and buried Antigone alive, will restore sacrifice, augury, and other forms of divination to Thebes.

Efforts to understand the past and future often involve a formal visit to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi. The Greeks called such a visit a *theoria* ('pilgrimage'), and it was followed by a return home to act upon what had been learned.²¹ In the opening scene of *Electra*, Orestes describes the response he received from Delphi instructing him how to avenge his father's killers (*El.* 32–43). The Old Tutor reiterates Apollo's command that Orestes pour offerings at his father's tomb *before* embarking on vengeance (82–85). We learn later that an ominous nightmare has visited Clytaemestra, presaging Orestes' return home. The Chorus celebrate the news, praising the role of dreams, divination, and oracles in predicting the future (473–501). Clytaemestra, however, fears the omen, and sends her daughter Chrysothemis with placatory gifts to Agamemnon's grave. The queen herself makes an onstage offering at Apollo's altar, praying that the god turn her nightmare to her own advantage (634–659). He seems to do so, for news comes from Delphi of Orestes' 'death', a ruse that leads to Clytaemestra's murder. After killing her, Orestes again refers to the god of Delphi, but in ambiguous terms: 'In the house/all is well, if Apollo prophesied well' (1424–1425). In this unsettling moment, Orestes questions his ritual contact with the god and the trustworthiness of oracular pronouncements that seem to align matricide with justice.

References to *theoria* occur in most of Sophocles' plays, but nowhere as often as in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. We hear of *six* separate pilgrimages to the Delphic oracle (four prior to the start of the play), each of signal importance. Worried that he may not be the child of Polybus and Merope, the young Oedipus leaves Corinth to consult the oracle. Warned at Delphi that he will

²¹ See Dillon (1997) and Nightingale (2004) 40–71.

kill his father and marry his mother, Oedipus chooses not to return home to Corinth. At the place where ‘the three roads meet’ (*OT* 716, 730, 1398–1399), he is attacked by an older traveller, whom he kills. That man, we later learn, was Oedipus’ father Laius, who *himself* was travelling to consult the Delphic oracle (114), presumably to learn how to end the plague caused by the Sphinx. This was Laius’ second effort to divine the future; the first occurred when he and his wife Jocasta received word—‘not from Apollo himself, but from his underlings’—that their son was destined to murder his father and marry his mother (711–712). In the play’s opening scene, we learn that Oedipus already has sent his brother-in-law Creon to Delphi to ask Apollo the cause of the new plague that has struck Thebes (68–77). When Creon finds himself accused of plotting with Teiresias for political power, he urges Oedipus to ‘go back to Pytho [Delphi]/and inquire of the oracle, whether I reported it truly’ (603–604). In the last scene, Creon as the new ruler sends another mission to the oracle to make sure that the punishment for Laius’ murderer still holds (1438–1445, 1518–1519). This final *theoria* emphasizes the lack of human certainty when interpreting divine messages, as well as the propriety, humility, and caution needed in dealing with the gods.²²

4. Supplication

A Greek facing a hopeless situation could place himself at the mercy of another by ritual supplication. Kneeling before the stronger party, reaching a hand to their chin, embracing their knees, and showing other signs of deference, the abject person would say *ἱκετεύω* (‘I supplicate ...’) and ask for protection or some other boon. A similar appeal could occur at the altar of a god, with suppliants signalling their status by bearing small branches or wands wound with wool. Calling on the appropriate deity (or on the city that housed the god’s precinct), suppliants appealed for help with the understanding that the gods—particularly Zeus—protected those who took such a desperate step.²³ As we noted in *Oedipus at Colonus*, the

²² On oracular ambiguity and the fallibility of human understanding, consider the pre-Socratic thinker Heraclitus: ‘The lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither declares nor conceals, but gives a sign’; and ‘Human nature has no set purpose, but the divine has’. DK 93 and 78 (= 33 and 55 in Kahn 1979). A prophet’s venality also might corrupt a god’s message, as Oedipus (*OT* 380–403) and Creon (*Ant.* 1034–1047, 1055) suspect.

²³ Gould (2001) 22–77.

blind Oedipus seeks asylum in the grove of the Eumenides, supplicating the chthonic deities—and then the Athenian king Theseus—to prevent Creon from taking him back to Thebes. Ritual supplication provides Sophocles' last play with its basic structure, conjoining the patterns of ritual with those of myth.²⁴ Sophocles frequently emphasizes tragic vulnerability through a suppliant's appeal. On several occasions in *Philoctetes*, the title character falls on his knees before others, using the term ἱκετεύω or its cognates. First, he supplicates Neoptolemus, imploring the young man to take him back to Greece (*Phil.* 470–489). Philoctetes then describes how he conveyed suppliant messages to his father back home, pleading for rescue from Lemnos (494–496). After Neoptolemus turns against Philoctetes and steals his bow, the desperate man supplicates him again (930–932), begging that he return the weapon necessary for his survival. Denied by Neoptolemus, Philoctetes then supplicates the Chorus of sailors, pleading that they take him home and not to Troy (1182). Only after this appeal fails does Neoptolemus change his mind. Rejecting Odysseus' instrumentalist view of Philoctetes, he returns the bow to the suppliant who has exposed his desperation so many times.

Supplication also plays a significant role in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which opens with a secondary Chorus of Thebans gathered around the altar before the palace. Bearing suppliant wands, they implore their king Oedipus for help and protection (*OT* 1–5, 40–42). After Oedipus promises to rid the city of plague, and Creon shares his news from the Delphic oracle, the suppliants remove their ritual boughs and disperse (142–150). The main Chorus then enter the orchestra praying to various gods (151–215) and describing the Theban wives and mothers of the plague victims who have come in supplication to the city's main altars (182–185). We may compare these gatherings

²⁴ See Burian (1972) 408–429; also Burian (1997a) 186–190 and Carey (2009) 123–124 and 128–129. On other rituals influencing the development of tragedy or providing the template for tragic myth, see (generally) Graf in McDonald/Walton (2007) 55–71. For sacrifice, see Burkert (1966) 87–121 and (1985) 1–4. On ritual scapegoating (esp. the Oedipus myth), see Girard (1977) 68–88 and (2004) 28–58 and 107–113; also Vernant in Vernant/Vidal-Naquet (1988/1990) 113–140, and Foley (1993) 525–538; for problems with these readings, see Burian (2009) 99–118. For the role of funeral lament and hero cult, see Ridgeway (1910). On Dionysiac cult, see Seaford (1994a) ('the cult of Dionysos ... transmitted a pattern of action to tragedy: the self-destruction of the ruling family, expressed in the perversion of ritual, ends in benefit, and in particular in the foundation of cult, for the whole polis', p. xix); and less convincingly, the Cambridge ritualists, summarized in Pickard-Cambridge (1962²) 126–129. For ephebic initiation, see Winkler (1990) 20–62; for the *ephebeia* and *Philoctetes*, Vidal-Naquet in Vernant/Vidal-Naquet (1990) 161–180, and (1986) 106–128.

with the one near the end of the play, when the blind Oedipus throws himself on Creon's mercy: 'Before the gods, I beg you for this ...' (1432–1434); 'take pity ... show your assent, by the touch of your hand' (1508–1510). Oedipus asks not only for exile on Mount Cithaeron, but also for the chance to embrace his incestuous daughters, pleading that Creon look after them in the future. These framing scenes capture the tragic *peripeteia* of Oedipus' life, from a powerful defender of his desperate citizens to a wretched suppliant himself.²⁵

The play features two other supplications, which dramatize the paradox of self-abasement as a step towards self-recognition. Having summoned Teiresias to the palace to discover the killer of Laius, Oedipus begs the blind prophet for help:

OEDIPUS: We are in your hands. For a man to help, using what powers and faculties he has, is the noblest labour.

TEIRESIAS: Alas, alas ...

....

Let me go home. Easier for you to bear your fate,
and I mine, if you trust me on this.

OEDIPUS: What you are saying is not lawful, nor is it kind
to the city that reared you, withholding your knowledge.

....

By the gods, if you know something, don't turn away,
for we all kneel down before you in supplication.

(OT 314–327)

The ruler of Thebes will use any means, including his own humiliation, to help rid the city of plague. Representing the townspeople who supplicated him in the opening scene, Oedipus now begs the blind seer to tell what he knows. Teiresias' disinclination to speak on behalf the city in crisis helps account for Oedipus' rage and incredulity when the prophet accuses *him* of murdering Laius (350–363).

Distraught at her husband's fear that he might be the killer, Jocasta prays at Apollo's altar (OT 911–923): 'To you, oh Lycian Apollo, for you are our nearest, I come as suppliant, with these manifestations [i.e. garlands and incense] of my prayer ...'. The god seems to answer Jocasta, for immediately a Messenger arrives announcing that Oedipus has inherited Polybus' throne

²⁵ Although Oedipus does not use the word 'I supplicate', he begs for pity and appeals to Creon *πρὸς θεῶν* ('by the gods' OT 1432) echoing his supplication of Teiresias, *μὴ πρὸς θεῶν* ('Do not by the gods ...' OT 326). A similar device frames *Oedipus at Colonus*. At the start Oedipus successfully supplicates the Furies (and later Theseus); near the end, he rejects his son Polyneices' supplication, cursing him instead (OC 1156–1180, 1254–1396).

in Corinth. However, Jocasta and Oedipus soon learn that he is not Polybus' son, but rather a foundling adopted by the Corinthian royal family. Realizing that Oedipus must be the baby she exposed long ago, Jocasta begs him to stop his investigation and then runs into the palace, where she commits suicide. Sophocles uses a comparable ritual 'turn' in *Electra* (634–661), where Clytaemestra's prayer to Apollo seems to be answered by a Messenger's arrival from Delphi. In this case, the false news of Orestes' death proves fatal to Clytaemestra; in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, it is the truth of the message that kills Jocasta. In both cases, supplication, prayer, and offerings to Apollo provide a moment of ritual stillness, the calm before the storm of tragic recognition.

5. *Ritual Time*

As we have seen, rituals incorporate several temporal dimensions. Rites of passage mark stages in a progression, signposts on an individual's journey from youth to maturity to old age and death. In addition to this linear path, rituals also suggest a patterned view of time, given their traditional form observed across generations. By conforming to an inherited structure, rooted in cultural practice, ritual participants experience reiterative time, a cycle of repeated occasions that give meaning to life in a community. But rituals also encourage those involved to go beyond their normal experience of sequence and pattern, and concentrate intently on the *now*. Energy focuses on the moment-by-moment unfolding of the rite, where details and precision are precisely what matter. By their very intensity, rituals can free participants (at least for a spell) from the mundane passage of time. Finally, the gods' role in ritual introduces another temporal perspective, inviting humans to imagine the eternal time of the gods. As Oedipus puts it, 'for the gods alone/there is no old age, nor is there death, ever' (*OC* 607–608).

When Sophocles evokes or enacts religious ritual, he introduces these four-fold temporalities. Characters and audiences experience time as linear, reiterative, intensely present, and eternal, as we observe when Clytaemestra and Electra each pray to Apollo in *Electra*. Although not a rite of passage, the two prayers fit a narrative sequence, for each is a consequence of Clytaemestra's dream, itself causally and chronologically linked to Agamemnon's murder. By having both mother and daughter appeal to Apollo at the same altar, Sophocles suggests a repetitive sense of time, arising from the re-enactment of a public offering. Although both pray for what will come, their language also focuses on the present moment. Electra emphasizes the immediacy of her appeal: 'But now, Lycian Apollo, with all I have/I beg you, I fall before

you, I implore you,/be our helper ...' (*El.* 1379–1381). For her part, Clytaemestra knows that Electra overhears her, and her prayer displays a keen awareness of its own unfolding:

Listen now, my protector Apollo,
to my cryptic utterance. For I do not speak
among friends, nor is it fitting for me to unfold
all to the light with her standing so near me. (637–640)

As for the immortal perspective on time, Clytaemestra acknowledges Apollo's divine understanding at the end of her prayer: 'As for all the rest, I believe you know it,/even if I remain silent, for you are a god./Surely the children of Zeus see all things' (657–659).

The funeral rites in *Ajax* offer a more intricate example of the way ritual draws together different temporalities. For Ajax, burial represents the final passage in his fatal journey to Troy, the proverbial end of the line. Against Menelaus, who would deny him that closure, Ajax's half-brother Teucer argues for a broader, cyclical perspective: 'Man, do not mistreat the dead;/if you do, know that you will suffer for it' (*Aj.* 1154–1155). Odysseus also suggests that the ritual extends beyond an individual to include the interests of society at large: 'You cannot dishonour Ajax without doing injustice,/for you would be destroying not just him,/but the laws of the gods .../... One day I too will come to this need [for burial]' (1342–1344, 1365). As for the ritual *now*, Teucer forbids Odysseus from joining the burial proper (*Aj.* 1393–1397), fearing that he might offend the dead Ajax and disrupt the rite. Regarding immortal time, both Teucer and Odysseus emphasize the long-term perspective of the gods. Sophocles' audience also knew that Ajax would find 'eternal' honours in an Athenian public cult, the conversion of kin-based death ritual into an ongoing communal rite celebrating *polis* solidarity.²⁶ When the funeral cortège bears the hero's body out of the theatre of Dionysus, Sophocles moves the action from mythical Troy towards his contemporaries, linking Ajax' ritual fulfilment to a kind of civic 'immortality'.

²⁶ Ajax manifests this godlike quality not only in his hero cult. One of the ten Attic tribes created during Cleisthenes' democratic reforms of 508/7 BC took his name, 'Aiantis'. Also, several leading fifth-century Athenians—Miltiades, Cimon, Thucydides, Alcibiades—traced their ancestry back to Ajax; see Rehm (2002) 133–138 with notes.

6. Chorus as Ritual Performers and Theatrical Self-Reference

In the second *stasimon* of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the Chorus despair at the breakdown of religious observance. If humans can commit with impunity acts that outrage the gods—if ‘divine things pass away’ (ἔρρει δὲ τὰ θεῖα, *OT* 910)—then ‘Why is it necessary for us to dance?’ (τί δεῖ με χορεύειν; 896). Given that the Chorus ask this question while performing a dance at the City Dionysia, their words resonate beyond the immediate dramatic context:

If they mean merely “Why should I, a Theban elder, dance?”, the question is ... slightly ludicrous; the meaning is surely “Why should I, an Athenian citizen, continue to serve in a chorus?” In speaking of themselves as a chorus they step out of the play into the contemporary world ...²⁷

Based on the traditional association of choral lyric with sacred or ritual occasions, Albert Henrichs argues that ‘choral dancing in ancient Greek culture *always* (my emphasis) constitutes a form of ritual performance, whether the dance is performed in the context of the dramatic festival or in other cultic and festive settings’.²⁸ If Henrichs is correct, then all choral lyric in tragedy, and any reference to choral dance in the plays, suggested a ritual function to the original audience, regardless of what fictional role the Chorus played in the performance.

As attractive as this idea appears to those exploring ritual in tragedy, it assumes what it must prove: that the audience *always* viewed a tragic chorus performing in the City Dionysia as ritual participants, whether they represented Athenian sailors at Troy (*Ajax*), Neoptolemus’ crew on Lemnos (*Philoctetes*), female friends of Electra (*Electra*), male citizens of Thebes (*Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*) or of Athens (*Oedipus at Colonus*), unmarried girls residing in Trachis (*Trachiniae*), or satyrs looking for Dionysus (*Ichneutae*). However, like the actors playing dramatic characters, all tragic and comic chorus members were masked. This was not the case for *other* choruses involved in ritual performance.

To be sure, tragic choruses can represent *more* than the fictive group identified in the play, for they often go beyond their dramatic identity to

²⁷ Dodds (1973) 75. Lloyd-Jones (1994a) (*OT* 896) catches the self-referential aspect: ‘Why should we honour the gods with dances?’

²⁸ Henrichs (1995), quotation at 59. In addition to the second *stasimon* and the following chorus in *OT*, Henrichs offers a trenchant analysis of the self-referential aspects of the Chorus in *Ajax* 693–705, *Trach.* 205–216, and *Ant.* 152–154 and 1146–1152. See also Easterling (1997c).

change the mood in the theatre and influence the audiences' understanding of events.²⁹ Nonetheless, the gender of the chorus and their relationship to place represent significant choices for the playwright, and their fictive identity (rather than the double vision suggested by Henrichs) must remain primary for them to have dramatic impact.³⁰ Self-referential passages are exceptions to the rule. To put the emphasis differently, theatrical self-reference cannot work if it is *always* in the consciousness of the performers or the audience. Were that the case, we would constantly be losing the story in its telling, and the play in its performance.

To the extent that Sophocles *uses* rituals, he shows how far his tragedies differ from them. His characters and choruses refer to (and re-enact) various sacred rites, undermine their efficacy, subvert their proper form, conflate radically different practices, and exploit their cultural, religious, and dramatic power. As the great 20th-century playwright Bertolt Brecht wrote, 'Theatre may be said to be derived from ritual, but this is only to say that it becomes theatre once the two have separated'.³¹ By his intricate use of ritual elements, Sophocles demonstrates that he not only understood this principle; he mastered it.

²⁹ Rehm (1992) 51–61.

³⁰ Gould (2001) [= Silk (1996a) 217–243].

³¹ (1974; orig. 1918–1956) 18. The author gratefully thanks Courtney Walsh and Andrea Nightingale for their help in improving this essay.

GODS AND HEROES IN SOPHOCLES*

Jon D. Mikalson

ξὺν τῷ θεῷ πᾶς καὶ γελᾷ κῶδύρεται

Sophocles, *Ajax* 383

‘When a god is involved, everyone both laughs and weeps’. The deities in Sophocles bring both goods and evils to mortals—this is an interpretative key to many of his plays, especially *Ajax*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Trachiniae*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*, but it arises in all of them. The focus is sometimes on an individual deity, like Athena in *Ajax* or Apollo in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and we will come to the major divinities in the tragedies, but first let us begin with a survey of the gods in general.¹

1. *The Gods as a Group*

Critics have much to say about the gods of Sophocles, but what do Sophoclean characters and choruses themselves believe that the divinities in general like or dislike? What goods and evils do they bring to mankind? First of all, not surprisingly, the gods appreciate those who show them respect and are displeased by those who do not. According to the Chorus of *Oedipus Tyrannus* (863–870) the laws/traditions (*nomoi*) regulating verbal and behavioural propriety were ‘born’ in the sky, and Olympus was their father. The gods, understandably, are concerned with these *nomoi* and punish violations of them. ‘Believe’, says Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, ‘that the gods look upon the mortal who is “properly respectful of the gods” (εὐσεβῆ), that they look upon those who are not, and never yet has there been an escape of any “religiously incorrect” man (ἀνοσίτου)’ (278–281). Later he claims that ‘the gods see well, but late, when a person, having dismissed “the divine

* It should be noted that all translations are my own.

¹ For helpful discussions of Sophoclean deities in the context of the whole corpus, not just in an individual play, see Parker (1999); Mikalson (1991); Lloyd-Jones (1983) 104–128.

things", turns to madness' (1536–1537). Lichas in *Trachiniae* claims, 'Not even divinities like hubris, and those who are arrogant from an evil tongue are themselves all residents of Hades' (280–282). Calchas, a prophet and an authoritative figure in *Ajax*, was reported to have said that 'exceptional and foolish people fall upon heavy failures from the gods, a person who born a mortal then does not think like a mortal' (758–761). Occasionally these concerns of the gods in general are attributed to Zeus himself. He, too, according to Heracles as *deus ex machina*, considers all things secondary to 'proper respect' in matters concerning the gods (*Phil.* 1440–1443) and 'hates the boasts of the big tongue', slaying the hubristic Capaneus with his lightning-bolt (*Ant.* 127–133). The gods are as concerned with disrespectful words as they are with such deeds. They see them well, although sometimes late, so that we may expect a time lag between crime and punishment—but punishment is, in the end, inescapable.

The goddess Athena herself in *Ajax* (132–133) claims that gods love 'those of sound thoughts' (τοὺς σωφρονᾶς) and hate the evil, and the Chorus of *Antigone* warns Creon that 'swift-footed harms from the gods cut short those who "think badly"' (1103–1104). Such 'bad thinking' can connote injustice as well as a hubristic disrespect towards the gods. For the Chorus of *Oedipus Tyrannus* their worship of the gods depends on the gods punishing acts of hubris, disrespect to the gods, and injustice (883–896). Philoctetes, addressing Odysseus in *Philoctetes*, shows confidence in the gods' concern for justice: 'You will perish for having treated unjustly this man, if the gods are concerned with justice, and I know that they are' (1035–1037), and in the same play the Chorus warns Neoptolemus that he must do what is right if he is to escape the 'righteous anger' (νέμεσις) of the gods (510–518. Cf. 601–602).

So suffer those who are disrespectful to the gods, hubristic, or unjust. But what divine favours can those who avoid this sin expect? Such favours are generally described in terms of safety and help. The guard of *Antigone*, after his rough encounters with Creon, gives the best statement of this: 'Now, after I have been saved beyond what I expected and thought, I owe much gratitude (χάρις) to the gods' (330–331). Theseus in *Oedipus at Colonus* attempts to encourage Oedipus: 'Know that you are safe if one of the gods keeps me safe as well' (1209–1210). In *Ajax* the messenger hopes that they can 'save' Ajax with a god's help (778–779). In that play even the disreputable Menelaus can claim that 'a god saves me' (1128), and the equally disreputable Clytaemestra in *Electra* makes monthly offerings to the 'saving gods' (280–281). When the protagonist of *Philoctetes* suffers from an acute attack of his disease, Neoptolemus asks him why he calls upon the gods;

Philoctetes answers that he entreats them to come as 'saviours and gentle to us' (737–738), much as Neoptolemus had earlier wished that the deities free Philoctetes from the same disease (462–463). Neoptolemus is also concerned throughout the play about the forthcoming voyage, either to Troy or to Philoctetes' homeland, and for this voyage he prays to the gods and looks to the safety and help they may provide (464–465, 528–529, 779–781, and 1076–1077). In *Oedipus at Colonus* Antigone wonders what 'help' she will receive from gods or mortals (828–829), and Polyneices makes Poseidon, with whom he has sought sanctuary, his 'helper' (1285–1286). The priest in the opening of *Oedipus Tyrannus* claims that Oedipus, 'with the assistance of a god', improved life in Thebes (38–39), and Tecmessa in *Ajax* imagines Ajax's mother praying to the gods that he come home alive (507–509). Of a completely different character from the other 'goods' bestowed by the Sophoclean gods is Haemon's claim in *Antigone* that 'gods create brains for humans, which are the best of all possessions' (683–684). Haemon's statement might almost be seen as a supplement to the famous Ode to Man (332–375) in which the Chorus lists the intellectual and other accomplishments of mankind but, surprisingly, credits none of them to the gods or their assistance. Perhaps, however, all these accomplishments were possible only because the gods give humans brains.

Sophoclean characters have a host of evils to lament, and, as will be seen later, they are more inclined to attribute such evils to the gods as a group than to individual gods. In Sophoclean tragedies 'the gods' or 'some god' are charged with destroying or harming cities (*Ant.* 162–163), families (*El.* 199–200, *Ant.* 583–585, 594–603, *OC* 371–373), and individuals (*Aj.* 489–490, *Ant.* 620–625, 1272–1275, *Phil.* 192–200, 1316–1317, *OC* 383–395, 962–965, 997–998, 970, 1034–1037). These gods shake things and people (*Ant.* 162–163, 584–585, 1274), strike them (*Aj.* 278–279), cause diseases including madness (*Aj.* 185, 611, *Phil.* 1326), deceive people (*Ant.* 1217–1218, *OC* 628), and lead individuals or their thoughts to destruction (*Ant.* 620–624, *OC* 252–253, 997–998). Such evils are inescapable (*El.* 696–697, *OC* 252–253), and one must simply bear them (*Ph.* 1316–1317, *OC* 1694). The attribution of evils to the gods either as a group or as individuals is, however, not a straightforward process. For example, Creon at the end of *Antigone* may lament that 'a god, with a great weight, struck me on the head and plunged me onto savage paths, overturning my happiness and trampling it underfoot' (1272–1275). According to Creon divinely caused evils ruined him, but was it a god or Creon himself who brought them about, and, if a god, were they really evils, or, in the greater scheme of things, goods? Or, again from *Antigone*, is it wrong for the gods to 'cast down' and 'mow down' the Labdacid family

(594–603) whose members had perpetrated acts that offended both gods and men? If Ajax is shown to be disrespectful of the gods, are the evils that befall him, attributed to the gods by the Chorus (*Aj.* 185–186, 278–279, 611), by Tecmessa (970), and by Ajax himself (450–459), really evils? Are they not the punishments for impious behaviour? When characters and choruses attribute sufferings to the gods, or even good things, one must consider in each instance who is making that claim and under what circumstances.

In Sophoclean tragedies, choruses and characters who claim that their sufferings are caused by the gods rarely criticize these gods. It is simply their explanation of the current situation, and Sophocles does not have them explore it further.² The exceptions are, however, significant. In *Oedipus at Colonus* Ismene tells her father, 'Now the gods set you aright, but before they destroyed you', to which Oedipus bitterly responds, 'It is a paltry thing to set aright as a old man one who fell as a young man' (394–395). In *Ajax* (950–951) Tecmessa worries about her likely future slavery to the Atreidae and says, 'Things would not be in this state if not by [the involvement of] the gods'. The coryphaeus, sympathetic to her, claims, '[The gods] made this grief too heavy', a statement shared by many readers of Sophocles' plays but expressed onstage only here. Finally, Philoctetes, after learning of the death of Achilles at Troy but the survival of Thersites, complains that the gods rejoice in saving the wicked from death but send to Hades the just and the good. 'Where', he explains, 'can I place these things, how praise them, when having observed divine actions I find the gods evil?' (*Phil.* 446–452) A strong indictment of the gods, indeed, but made long before Philoctetes becomes aware of the 'plan of Zeus' behind his sufferings and the events at Troy, which will result ultimately in his own glory and fame.³

Daimones, too, may bring humans good or evil, but first we must sort out Sophocles' use of this term. Occasionally a *daimon* is a specific god, such as Apollo (*El.* 658 and *OT* 244), Poseidon (*OC* 709), and even Zeus (*OC* 1480). A character may also use the term of a deity whose identity he does not know (*Aj.* 243, *El.* 1265–1270, *Ant.* 832–833). *Daimones*, in the plural, almost always means 'the gods' (*Aj.* 1130, *OT* 34, 886, 912, 1378–1379, *Ant.* 282–283, 921, *Trach.* 280, *Phil.* 447, 462–463, *OC* 1451–1452). These never receive prayers or sacrifices. The second major category of meaning for *daimon* is 'fortune' or some indeterminate force, bringing either what is good (*El.* 999, 1306. Cf. 916–919.) or, more usually, what is bad (*Aj.* 534, 1214–1215, *El.*

² On Sophocles' tendency not to offer motives for divine actions, see Parker (1999).

³ On this episode, see Parker (1999) 22–23.

916–918, 1156–1157, *Trach.* 910; *OC* 75–76). *Daimon* seems to mean this whenever it is qualified, either by an adjective such as ‘lucky’ or ‘hateful’ (*Aj.* 1214–1215, *El.* 916–918, 999, 1156–1157, *Phil.* 1100, *OC* 1337) or by a possessive such as ‘my’, ‘your’, or ‘our’ (*Aj.* 534, *El.* 1156–1157; *Trach.* 910). These *daimones*, whether as the collective of gods, a specific or unknown god, may bring good (*El.* 657–658, *Trach.* 280, *Phil.* 462–463) or evil (*Aj.* 243, *Ant.* 832–833, *Phil.* 446–452, 1118). And, of course, *daimon* as ‘bad fortune’ brings sufferings, as ‘good fortune’ brings good. It is noteworthy, however, that *daimon* as ‘fortune’ causes suffering more often than do *daimones* as some form of deity.

In *Oedipus Tyrannus* Sophocles masterfully weaves together these various meanings of *daimon* around Oedipus and brings the whole to a stunning, and characteristically Sophoclean conclusion. The *daimon* which afflicts Oedipus is increasingly personalized, increasingly recognized as peculiar to him, and finally even identified as a specific deity. Oedipus first becomes linked with *daimones* in lines 815–816 as he begins to realize that he may have murdered Laius and, in cursing the murderer to social and political banishment, may have cursed himself: ‘Who could be more miserable than I, who could be more *daimon*-hated?’ Then, at line 828, he exclaims, ‘Wouldn’t a man be right in judging that these things come upon me from a savage *daimon*?’ The Chorus, upon learning the full horror of Oedipus’ past, refer to ‘his’ *daimon*: ‘Having your *daimon*, yours, as an example, poor Oedipus, I think men have no blessedness’ (1193). As the Chorus behold the blinded Oedipus, they pepper him with questions: ‘What madness came upon you? Which *daimon* is it that, on top of your (already) ill-*daimoned* fate, leaps greater than the longest?’ (1300–1302). ‘How did you have the heart to destroy your eyes like that? Which of the *daimones* incited you to it?’ (1327–1328). In response to this, Oedipus finally cries out, ‘It was Apollo, Apollo, my friends, the one who is bringing to pass these evil, evil woes of mine’ (1329–1330). In Oedipus’ mind, at this moment, Apollo is the oft-mentioned *daimon* afflicting his life. By invoking the multiple dimensions of *daimon* in this sequence Sophocles was able to fuse the responsibilities of fate, of Apollo and his oracles, and of Oedipus himself into one mass, a mass which has not been, and perhaps cannot be analyzed completely.⁴

⁴ For a fuller version of this argument, see Mikalson (1991) 28–29.

2. *Zeus*

We have just seen that Oedipus held Apollo responsible for his miseries, and we now turn to Sophocles' presentation of individual deities. If we wish to proceed like the Greeks themselves, we must begin with Zeus. Regularly in Sophocles, Zeus is the supreme deity (*OT* 903–904, *Ant.* 604–610, *Trach.* 127–128, *Phil.* 1289, *OC* 1085–1086), the 'father' (*Aj.* 1389, *OT* 202, *Trach.* 275), and his power is ageless and invincible (*OT* 904–905, *Ant.* 604–610, *Phil.* 679, 1467–1468, *OC* 1515). Sophocles usually gives precedence to Zeus over his son Apollo (*Aj.* 185–186 and *OT* 498–499), and more generally among the Olympians as a whole. In *Trachinae* 500–502 Zeus is listed first of the deities whom Aphrodite 'has deceived', then come his brothers Hades and Poseidon. In *Oedipus at Colonus* the Chorus prays first to Zeus for military victory, then to Athena, Apollo, and Artemis (1085–1095). In *Ajax* 1389–1391 Teucer directs his prayer for the death of the Atreidae first to Zeus, then to Erinyes and Dike. Of the deities, Zeus alone appears in all the surviving Sophoclean tragedies.

Sophocles presents a number of Zeuses distinguished by epithets of function that were common in cult: Agonios, 'Of Contests', who decided in Heraclides' favour the contest for the marriage of Deianeira (*Trach.* 26); Ephestios, 'Of the Hearth', whom, along with their marriage bed, Tecmessa invokes in an appeal to Ajax (*Aj.* 492–493); Herkeios, 'Of the Fence', 'Protector of the Household', whom Creon makes represent the whole family (*Ant.* 486–487); Hikesios, 'Of Suppliants', invoked by Philoctetes in an appeal to Neoptolemus (*Phil.* 484); Horkios, 'Of Oaths', once explicitly (*Phil.* 1324) and regularly implicitly (*Trach.* 399, 1185–1188, *Phil.* 1289, and *OC* 882, 1766–1767) called upon by characters to reinforce and put a divine sanction upon their or others' statements; Morios, 'Of the Sacred Olives', a cult deity in Athens (*OC* 704–705); Tropaios, 'Of Military Victory', 'Of the Victory Monument', receives bronze weapons of the defeated in *Antigone* 141–143, and in *Trachinae* 303–305 Deianeira expresses to him the hope that she may never see him come against her country. All these Zeuses, with epithets so familiar in the religion practised by the audience, are treated only in positive terms.

In *Oedipus at Colonus* Sophocles gives to a 'generic' Zeus, without any epithet of locale or function, a major and consistently beneficent role. The Eumenides offer Oedipus hospitality and sanctuary, and Apollo gives the oracles that bring Oedipus to their sanctuary and tell him of his future there as a hero protecting the Athenians. But Zeus is the ultimate authority who signals with his thunder, lightning, and perhaps even an earthquake, the time for Oedipus' heroization to begin, and who ultimately ratifies Oedipus'

new status. Sophocles links the oracles of Apollo to Zeus (621–623, 791–793) and keeps him present throughout the play, preparing for his importance in the denouement. The Chorus, on first seeing Oedipus cry out, ‘O Zeus’ (143), and on learning who Antigone and Ismene are, again invokes Zeus (532). Antigone, on seeing Ismene approaching (310) and again thinking of her own future (1749), invokes Zeus when, as a girl, we might expect her to call on a female deity. Oedipus asks Zeus to grant good to men such as Theseus (642). The Chorus apparently invokes Zeus as a witness to its promise to help Oedipus, as Creon’s response indicates (882). When we might expect Athena, Zeus is treated by the Chorus as the deity who will help the Athenians defeat the Thebans in battle (1079), and then again in their prayer for victory he is the deity first addressed, followed by Athena, Apollo, and Artemis (1085–1095). In his quarrel with Oedipus, Polyneices appeals to Aidôs ‘who sits with Zeus on the throne’ (1267–1268), and Oedipus counters with Dike, ‘who sits with Zeus’ (1381–1382). Polyneices, as he departs, hopes that Zeus will ‘do good’ for his sisters (1435). This unusual profusion of appeals to Zeus, the most in any Sophoclean play, when the poet could have used a variety of other deities, is intended, I think, to prepare for his critical role of signalling and thereby validating Oedipus’ heroization at the end of the play. Apollo had prophesied to Oedipus that an earthquake, thunder, or the ‘flash of Zeus’ would signal to him his death, his respite from evils (94–95), and in 1456 the Chorus first hears thunder which Oedipus recognizes as the sign that will lead him to Hades. The Chorus sees lightning, too, which it attributes to Zeus (1466–1471) and recognizes as another sign. They pray that Zeus be ‘propitious’ and ‘favourable’ (1480–1485). Theseus, who has not heard the prophecy, initially thinks it may be just a thunderstorm with hail, the type of storm Zeus causes (1502–1504). The Chorus remarks that Zeus’ thunder and lightning are continuous (1514–1515), and Oedipus recognizes that ‘what is present from the god’ is hastening him on (1540). Finally, the messenger reports that when Oedipus and his group entered the grove of the Eumenides, Zeus—now, remarkably, Zeus Chthonios—gave a final loud noise (1606), and this initiates the final stage in Oedipus’ heroization. Sophocles, with this introduction of Zeus Chthonios, may be fulfilling all three elements of the prophecy (thunder, lightning, *and* earthquake), but, more importantly, shows Oedipus’ transition into the chthonic world and the approval and validation of this by the highest divine power both above (Zeus Ouranios) and below (Zeus Chthonios). Sophocles has given the strongest possible authority to his protagonist’s heroization.

The strongest criticisms of Zeus appear in *Trachiniae*, which dramatizes the miseries of Zeus’ son Heracles. This Zeus is a hybrid, an amalgam of

various local cultic (Kenaïos and Oitaïos), functional (oaths, lightning, etc.), and mythological/Homeric aspects. We have Zeus Horkios (1185–1190), Zeus Sender of Lightning (436–437, 1086–1088), Zeus of Cenaëum (237–241, 287–288, 750–754, 993–1003), and the Zeus who gave oracles at Dodona (164–172, 1159–1172), all expressly labelled ‘the father of Heracles’ and thereby linked together, as well as to the epic Zeus of Heracles’ myths. We also have Zeus Oitaïos, i.e. of Mount Oeta, where Heracles’ funeral pyre would be placed. Heracles was attacked by Deianeira’s poisoned robe as he sacrificed at the altar of Zeus Kenaïos, and Sophocles later has him invoke this very altar as a witness to the poor return (incurable pain and death) he received from the sacrifices he made (993–1003). But it is Hyllus, Heracles’ own son, who raises the strongest objections, first deflecting his criticisms from Zeus to the gods as a group:

Recognize the great lack of feeling of the gods over deeds like this. They beget children and are celebrated as fathers, but they look upon such sufferings [and do nothing about them]. No one sees what lies in the future, but the current situation is pitiable for us and shameful for the gods. (1266–1272)

Hyllus’ most devastating criticism, coming as the last words in the play and so never answered, is that ‘There are many new and strange sufferings here, and there is nothing that is not Zeus’ (1277–1278). Deianeira, out of her love for Heracles, has accidentally poisoned him with what she thought was a love-philtre, and committed suicide when she realized what she had done. Heracles suffers miserably and will die. Is Hyllus, whose relationship with his own father is problematic, justified in his criticisms? Did Zeus cause all of this? No, there is sufficient human motivation to drive the events. Could Zeus have prevented it and saved his son? Of course, but what would the myth of Heracles be, the ‘fame’ of Heracles, if his father had protected him in every labour and adventure? That myth presumes the neglect, if that is the right word, of his father Zeus, and Sophocles, like Euripides later in his *Heracles Furens*, dramatizes the father/son relationship that the myth implies. The criticisms of Zeus in *Trachiniae* are directed against a very specific mythological and social (father/son) context, and however valid and powerful they may be in this context, we should be hesitant to apply them to all of Zeus’ or the other gods’ relationships with human beings.⁵

Elsewhere the generic, Homeric Zeus is represented as the upholder of the divine order. The Heracles of *Philoctetes*, an authoritative figure as *deus*

⁵ For further discussion of Zeus in *Trachiniae*, see Mikalson (1986).

ex machina, reveals Zeus' plans for Philoctetes and Troy, plans which bring much suffering to Philoctetes but will result in his ultimate glory, much as Heracles himself has already won 'immortal virtue' through his sufferings (1418–1420). Heracles, importantly, warns Philoctetes and Neoptolemus that, when they sack Troy, they are to 'show proper respect' (εὐσεβεῖν) in matters concerning the gods, 'because father Zeus considers all other things secondary' (1440–1443). The Chorus of *Oedipus Tyrannus* ask him to be aware that 'the honours' of Apollo and 'the divine things' are at risk of perishing (903–910). And Zeus punishes *hubris*, as the Chorus acknowledges in *Antigone* 127–133 (Cf. *Trach.* 274–283). The Zeuses in Sophocles are thus quite different. Some bring only good, some, as in *Trachiniae* and *Philoctetes*, bring or allow human suffering and its rewards. And some represent and defend the divine order. Each Zeus, as each deity in tragedy, was created for the circumstances of the individual plot, and it may be mistaken to assume that any one of them represents, by himself, Sophocles' conception of the father of the gods or a unified theology.

3. Apollo

We have seen how Oedipus, when pressed by the Chorus to identify the *daimon* causing his miseries, cries out, 'It was Apollo, Apollo' (*OT* 1329–1330). This is a powerful indictment of Apollo, but is as inconsistent with the other presentation of Apollo in Sophocles as are the indictments of Zeus in *Trachiniae*. Let us begin with Apollo Pythios, the god of the Delphic Oracle, and distinguish between the three oracles given by Apollo in *Oedipus Tyrannus*: those to Laius and Oedipus about their future and that to the Thebans about how to end the plague. The last is a conventional Delphic oracle, a literary form of real oracles given to cities suffering such things, and for this Apollo is uniformly praised. Creon learns at Delphi and reports to Oedipus that Thebes is suffering its 'disease' as a result of pollution from the murder of Laius, and that the murderer must be expelled from Thebes or killed (95–101, 241–243, 305–309). The Chorus views this oracle as a statement of Zeus (151–152). The disease, pollution, and their elimination involved in this oracle are all traditional Delphic concerns. For this the characters and Chorus petition Apollo to provide a solution, and imagine him offering it (95–98, 133–134, 145–146, 149–150, 305–309, 469–470, 919–921, 1438–1441). With regard to this oracle Apollo is viewed only positively. Oedipus claims Apollo 'deservedly' drew attention to the dead man (133–134). Apollo is 'sagacious' in knowing mortal matters (498–499), a 'saviour' (149–150), one of the gods who 'ward

off death' (163–164), associated with 'good fortune' (145–146), and deserving of worship (154–155). Oedipus early in the play wanted to assist the god in fulfilling this oracle (244–245, 252–254) and at the end seems to accept its propriety (1440–1441). The one criticism raised about this oracle, by the coryphaeus, that Apollo should have named the murderer, is refuted by Oedipus (278–281). Apollo's oracle on the plague dominates the first half of the play, and the two famous oracles concerning Oedipus, both more folkloric than historical in character, are introduced only halfway through the play.⁶ Jocasta disparagingly describes the oracle Laius received—that he would die at the hands of a child born from him and Jocasta (711–725). Soon afterwards Oedipus reports the oracle he received at Delphi, that he 'necessarily' would have sexual intercourse with his mother, would bring to light a 'race unendurable, and would be the murderer of the father who begat him' (787–793. Cf. 964–967, 994–996). It is Jocasta's and Oedipus' scepticism of these oracles that motivates the Chorus to respond by linking respect for oracles with the 'honours' of Apollo and, beyond that, with 'proper respect' and worship of the gods in general (897–910). Apollo not only gives oracles, but brings (or fails to bring) them to fulfilment (720–722. Cf. 376–377), and it is probably in this sense that Oedipus can dramatically claim that Apollo is 'the one who is bringing to pass these evil, evil woes of mine', except, of course, his self-blinding, for which he claims personal responsibility (1329–1335). Throughout the play the Apollo of the plague oracle, his common role, is viewed positively as a saviour of Thebes and its citizens. The harm he brings to Oedipus and his family, if one chooses to see Apollo's role in this way, concerns only the oracles on the fate of Laius and Oedipus.

In *Oedipus at Colonus* neither Oedipus nor anyone else faults Apollo for his oracles or anything he has done. Three sets of Delphic oracles come into play: that given to Laius, those given to Oedipus, and those given to the Thebans. Oedipus sees as one factor absolving him from guilt for murdering his father the fact it had been prophesied to Laius, before Oedipus was born, that he would die at the hands of his children (962–973). Apollo, as in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, had, of course, prophesied to Oedipus that he would kill his father, probably the 'old oracles' which Apollo 'brought to fulfilment'

⁶ The consequences of these oracles are, however, at least hinted at earlier by Teiresias (376–377) who in this play is uniquely linked to Apollo as his 'slave' (410), and one must imagine that the audience was familiar with some form of these oracles and hence would catch the allusion in Teiresias' statement.

in 453–454 (Cf. 86–87). But Sophocles introduces, without precedent in the Theban cycle, other oracles that Oedipus apparently received on the same occasion, that he would find hospitality, a final respite from his evils, and death at the sanctuary of the Eumenides at Colonus, that he would bring profit to those (i.e. the Athenians) who received him and destruction to those (i.e. the Thebans) who drove him from their country, and that, at Colonus, he would receive signs of this (thunder, lightning, or earthquake) (84–103). Theseus can even suggest that Apollo ‘sent’ Oedipus to Colonus (665), and, near the end, after the sign of thunder, Oedipus recognizes that his ‘prophesied end of life has arrived’ (1472–1473). The final set of prophecies came to the Thebans and were reported to Oedipus by Ismene (353–355): that the Thebans must suffer defeat in Athens (604–605) and that Oedipus’ corpse, ‘sleeping and buried’, will drink their warm blood (621–623). Related to all this, or perhaps just a different statement of it, is Apollo’s prophecy that Oedipus, dead or alive, would be much sought after by the Thebans for their own safety because their power depended on him (387–392). Oedipus sees Zeus’ authority behind Apollo’s pronouncements to the Thebans (623, 791–793).

The oracles to Laius and Oedipus all come true, and the dynamics of the play indicate that those to the Thebans will also, if the proper conditions arise. Concerning all these oracles and their effects on those involved there is no criticism even by Oedipus, who is at such pains to explain and justify his life. Polyneices comments that Oedipus, the one person most affected by all of them, ‘gives himself over to oracles’ (1331–1332. Cf. 791–793). In regard to the Theban oracles and the changed status they bring to Oedipus, Ismene says, ‘The gods set you aright now, but before they destroyed you’ (394). Both Ismene and Oedipus, when moving from speaking of oracles to evils or possible deceptions, introduce ‘the gods’ in general, not Apollo. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, as in most of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, no blame for the oracles is attributed specifically to Apollo Pythios.⁷

Apollo Pythios has a background role in *Electra*, too, but it is Apollo Lykeios who is, as it were, a silent presence onstage, and both serve to further the causes of the sympathetic characters Electra and Orestes. After Orestes had decided to avenge his father, he consulted Apollo at Delphi and was told to do two things: to kill Aegisthus and Clytaemestra by stealth, without an army, and to make funeral offerings on the grave of his father

⁷ As Parker (1999) 24 notes, ‘The stricken Oedipus barely complains against the gods, much though moderns have complained on his behalf’.

(32–37, 51–53, 82–84). Both commands help to determine Orestes' actions and structure the plot of the rest of the play. It is Apollo Pythios whom the Chorus claims is not 'unconcerned' with the descendants of Agamemnon (180–182). Apollo Lykeios is casually introduced by the pedagogue in the prologue as he points out to Orestes landmarks visible from Mycenae: the grove of Io, the 'Lykeian agora' of Argos, and the famous temple of Hera (4–8). All give local colouring to the setting. Io, the long-suffering princess, and Hera, the goddess of marriage, are appropriate to the themes of the play but do not appear again. However, the god of the Lykeian agora—the 'wolf-killing' (λυκοκτόνου) god, as Sophocles etymologizes Lykeios—will have a prominent role. Apollo Lykeios comes to the fore in a pair of opposing prayers: the first, unsuccessful, by Clytaemestra (634–659); the second, successful, by Electra at a climax in the action (1376–1383). Both pray outside the palace gates, and here Apollo Lykeios is assimilated to the Apollo Agyieus/Alexikakos whose statue stood before the doors of many Greek houses. Clytaemestra brings offerings and asks Apollo to hear the prayer which she must deliver silently, given the hostile bystanders. She is motivated to pray because of the fearful dream she received the previous night, and asks Apollo to grant its accomplishment if it is favourable, or to turn it on her enemies if it is not. Then she asks that Apollo not allow her enemies to drive her away from the wealth she currently enjoys, and instead to allow her to enjoy her current life and to continue to tend the house of the Atreidae, residing with those of her friends and children who do not cause her 'bitter pain'. She, or rather Sophocles, thus assimilates this Apollo to Apollo Alexikakos, the averter of evil. Clytaemestra closes by invoking the god with his Argive epithet, Lykeios, and asks that he, 'listening in a kindly way', fulfil her requests, both spoken and unspoken. Her unspoken request is, no doubt, for the death of her son Orestes. None of this, of course, is to happen. As Orestes and Pylades enter the palace, Electra prays to the same god at the same altar. She asks, like Clytaemestra, for Apollo to 'listen in a kindly way', to both her and the two young men. She had before made offerings to Apollo, but today apparently has no offerings to give. She asks him to be an 'eager helper of their plans' and to 'show to humans what kind of punishments the gods give for "lack of piety" (δυσσεβείας)'. This last request closes the prayer and becomes almost programmatic for the denouement of the play. To judge by the outcome, Apollo rejects the prayer of a woman who has murdered her husband and wants her son dead, but accepts that of a girl asking for a demonstration of the gods' punishment of impiety. There is nothing for which to fault Apollo in the play, and, if we wish to develop an overall picture of Apollo in Sophocles, we must

weigh the numerous goods that Apollo provides in Sophoclean plays against the one cry of Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus* that Apollo has caused his evils.⁸

4. *Artemis*

In prayers Artemis is often associated, seemingly as a junior partner, with her brother Apollo and other deities. In *Oedipus Tyrannus* 159–215, in the prayers to avert the plague, she is invoked with a Theban colouring, after Athena and before Apollo, and then again with Zeus, Apollo, and Dionysus. In *Oedipus at Colonus* 1085–1095 the Chorus prays to Zeus, Athena, Apollo, and Artemis, ‘the attendant of spotted, swift-footed deer’, to give victory to the Athenians over the Thebans. She is, as often in Greek life, invoked particularly by women, by Clytaemestra (*El.* 626) and then by Electra (1239–1242) on a particularly female issue. In *Trachiniae* 207–215 the Chorus, upon news of Heracles’ return, tells the men to celebrate Apollo, but the maidens to ‘shout for’ Artemis Ortygia, the deer-slayer, the torch-bearer. Two incidents reflect the dangerous character of this goddess. In *Ajax* the Chorus mistakenly thinks that Ajax may be being punished by Artemis Tauropola for not giving her spoils after a battle or a deer hunt (172–178). Electra, in describing the circumstances of the need to sacrifice Iphigeneia, gives the most interesting account of Artemis. Agamemnon on a hunt drove a deer from Artemis’ sanctuary at Artemision and killed it, and then boasted over it. Artemis, filled with wrath, prevented the Greeks from sailing to Troy or back home until Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigeneia as a recompense for this animal (*El.* 563–576).⁹ We might think a deity should not show such ‘wrath’, but neither the Chorus of *Ajax* nor Electra express this concern.

5. *Athena*

In the surviving plays Sophocles offers three Athenas: a Theban, an Athenian, and a Homeric. In *Antigone* Eurydice leaves the palace at Thebes to pray to Athena (1184–1185), and in *Oedipus Tyrannus* it is at her two temples that some citizens are seeking relief from the plague (19–21). In one ode

⁸ In *Phil.* 334–336 Neoptolemus claims that Apollo killed his father Achilles but neither he nor Philoctetes in any way criticize the god for this.

⁹ On this account, see Finglass (2007) 267–268.

(159–189) the Chorus prays to her first and last, with Apollo and Artemis between, to ward off the sufferings of the plague. They call her ‘golden’, apparently an epithet of the real Athena of Thebes. Sophocles, however, gives this Athena no role in ending the plague. An Athenian Athena is featured in *Oedipus at Colonus*, set in Athens. Oedipus speaks of Athens as the ‘most honoured of all cities, named after greatest Pallas (Athena)’ (107–108). The Athenians of this play, like the real Athenians, honour Athena Hippias (Of Horses) (1070–1071) and Moria (Of the Sacred Olives) (704–706). The Chorus include Athena, with Zeus, Apollo, and Artemis, in their prayer that the Athenians defeat the Thebans in battle (1085–1095), but, apart from that, this Athena, and in fact all the Athenas discussed thus far, are uninvolved in the action, serving rather to provide some local colour.

The Homeric Athena of *Ajax* is, however, a driving force of that play. She is not a very attractive individual, but the gods of epic and tragedy never are when they are disrespected and angry. And her ‘wrath’ is ‘heavy’ indeed (654–656. Cf. 756–757). She brings about the destruction of Ajax, to whom once she was an ‘ally in battle’ (90, 117), not simply by killing him, but by destroying the ‘fame’ (κλέος) in which he and other Homeric heroes took so much pride, by making him a fool and a disgrace in the eyes of his Greek peers, resulting in his suicide. In the process she toys with him maliciously, like a cat with a cornered mouse (89–117). She can ask rhetorically, as many Greeks could, ‘Is laughter at your enemies not the most pleasant laughter?’ (79). She views her deluding of the normally reasonable Ajax—a delusion that diverted his planned attack on the Greek leaders to being an assault on sheep and goats—as a demonstration of the ‘strength of the gods’ (118). But why was Ajax her victim? She herself explains to Odysseus: ‘When you see these things, do not yourself say any arrogant word against the gods, and, if you have physical strength or wealth, do not assume any pride, since a day diminishes and raises up again all human affairs. The gods love those who are commonsensical, and they hate the evil’ (127–133). Such is the general moral Athena draws from the situation.¹⁰ But does it apply to Ajax? The words of Calchas, the prophet who must, in the context of tragedy, be believed, make explicit the connection: ‘Exceptional and thoughtless people fall upon heavy failures from the gods, a person who is born a human then does not think as befits a human being’.¹¹ Calchas reports that Ajax

¹⁰ Tecmessa, who never fully understands the situation, wrongly thinks that Athena brought misery to Ajax as a favour to her favourite Odysseus (952–953).

¹¹ As representative of those critics who think that neither Athena nor Calchas is an authoritative voice in the play, see Garvie (1998) 136–137, 196–197.

before coming to Troy told his father that he could win fame even without the help of the gods, and in battle at Troy he told Athena herself, a goddess of warfare, that he did not need her assistance. In other words, Ajax did not give the gods and Athena herself their due honours. Calchas concludes, 'By such words Ajax drew the unpleasant anger of the goddess, because he did not think as befits a human' (758–777). Athena lays out the general principles of the case against Ajax, and Calchas provides the evidence. In the play itself, Ajax gives one final expression of his attitude to the gods, to Tecmessa, 'Do you not know that I am in no way indebted to the gods, so as to serve them?' Tecmessa immediately recognizes the impropriety of the statement (589–591). It is only in his *Trugrede* that Ajax can say that in the future he will know to 'yield' to the gods (666–667). Athena was deservedly wrathful, and Ajax justly punished. We may be offended by the way and spirit in which Athena punished Ajax, and we may agree with the Chorus that 'the gods made this grief too exceptionally heavy' (951), but as many characters and spectators of Greek tragedy learned, the Greek gods, usually as beneficent as the Theban and Athenian Athena were and even as the Athena of *Ajax* was to Odysseus (14, 34–37, 952–953), can become frighteningly cruel when they have been wronged by humans.

6. *Dionysus*

Sophocles' tragedies were presented at Dionysus' festivals in Athens, and one might expect a greater presence of the god in the surviving plays of Sophocles. He is absent entirely from *Ajax*, *Electra*, and *Philoctetes*, and receives only brief notice in *Oedipus at Colonus* (678–680). But Dionysus is featured in the two plays, *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*, set in his homeland Thebes. In *Antigone* 153–154 it is appropriate that he leads the dances after the Theban military victory, and in *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1105–1109 it is charming to see him featured as a possible father of Oedipus up on the slopes of Cithaeron. Both reflect happy, hopeful moments for the Chorus, the setting in which we expect to find Dionysus (Cf. *Trach.* 218–220). But this is also a powerful god who, like the Dionysus of Euripides' *Bacchae*, can punish the Edonian king Lycurgus for trying to halt the rituals of his devotees (*Ant.* 955–965). In the great hymn celebrating the worldwide range of the god in *Antigone* 1115–1152, he is asked 'to purify' the diseased city of Thebes—a function not usually his. Similarly in *Oedipus Tyrannus* 209–215 Dionysus receives the final prayer from the Chorus for help against the

plague-causing Ares. Sophocles seems, in these Theban plays, to fashion a Dionysus with new powers (purification, especially) so that he can respond to the immediate needs of his city.

7. *Poseidon*

Poseidon is featured only in *Oedipus at Colonus*, but is there particularly interesting because, with one variant, he is portrayed very much as a cultic, state deity. Colonus gave his name to the deme and was its founder, but in a common hero/god relationship, Poseidon 'holds it' (54–55) and is the god 'who stands over it', its tutelary (888–889). The Chorus devotes the entire closing antistrophe of the first *stasimon* to him (707–719). From his gift the deme can boast of good horses, good colts, and good seas. Poseidon introduced there the use of the bit for horses, and this accords well both with the 'well horsed land' (668–669) and with the sanctuary of Poseidon Hippios (Of Horses) attested for Colonus (Paus. 1.30.4). In this antistrophe Sophocles seemingly expands the range of interest of the Colonus Poseidon beyond horses to seamanship and specifically describes the oar, suggesting, perhaps, that Poseidon taught the demesmen the art of rowing (716–719), and this aspect of Poseidon alone is featured in the rest of the play (888, 1493–1495). Sophocles thereby fuses two activities of Poseidon, horsemanship and seamanship, usually kept distinct in cult (Cf. 1070–1073, where the god of earthquakes may also be alluded to). The Colonus sanctuary and altar of Poseidon fulfil two functions in the play: they bring Theseus to the deme, where his presence will be needed, and keep him there, because he is sacrificing to Poseidon when he hears both of Oedipus' arrival and of his danger (888–889, 1491–1495); it is also at the altar of Poseidon that Polyneices seeks refuge (1156–1159), and Polyneices becomes the suppliant of Poseidon (1278) and the god becomes his 'helper' (1285–1286). It becomes a matter of human 'concern' for Poseidon to respect Polyneices' sanctuary (1179–1184), and this 'concern for Poseidon' allows both Polyneices' interview with Oedipus and his safe departure.

8. *Heroes*

Sophocles concludes his *Oedipus at Colonus* with a description of the heroization of Oedipus, his transformation from a living human being to one who—or whose body—is assumed to have, after his death, powers beyond those of the ordinary dead. Oedipus is no longer a Sophoclean hero in a

merely literary sense. He becomes a hero of cult, his tomb a sanctuary. Sophocles' depiction of this heroization is precious, the most detailed surviving from antiquity. Three other such cultic heroes receive only brief mention in the extant Sophoclean tragedies: the 'savage minded' Chryse whose snake bit Philoctetes (*Phil.* 192–194, 1326–1328); Amphiaraus, who, although dead, apparently still retains his mental faculties (*El.* 837–844); and the horseman Colonus, the 'founder' and eponymous hero of the deme Colonus (*OC* 58–61, 668–670).¹² These cultic heroes, as the above list suggests, are a heterogeneous group. They can be classified into types, but even within the types their natures and cults differ so much that each seems *sui generis*, a product primarily of local concerns and myths.

There are, however, some characteristics of Oedipus' heroic status and cult in *Oedipus at Colonus* that deserve attention. The first is that he dies. The painless and mysterious manner of his death (1456–1779) is truly exceptional, but the fact of the matter is that he dies and remains dead. He speaks of himself, and others speak of him, exactly as they would of an ordinary dead person (582, 621–622, 1472–1473, 1486–1487, 1580, 1701). The Chorus can imagine him gone to Hades (1461, 1551–1552, 1568–1578, 1701, 1706–1707), like the common dead. There is no indication, either from Oedipus or observers, that the hero Oedipus will, in the grave or in Hades, have a higher status or consciousness or a better afterlife than those of the ordinary dead. His bones, apparently, will work their magic of protection on their own, without the hero's conscious effort. The only benefit to Oedipus from his heroization is, apparently, that he will even after his death be able to 'help his friends' (the Athenians) and 'harm his enemies' (the Thebans), a not inconsiderable benefit in the value scheme of the Greeks. To the end, Oedipus is an angry man, especially towards the Thebans and to his sons who first expelled him and then tried to recover him for their own benefit; this anger is reflected in the new cult hero Oedipus. He is a benefactor to the Athenians only in the harm he can bring to his own family and countrymen. The greatest manifestation of this is, of course, his curses on his sons (1370–1396). Even the fame and honour that would normally accompany such a cultic hero are attenuated because, uncharacteristically of most other hero cults, his sanctuary is to be kept secret and no public offerings or rituals are prescribed.¹³ Critics'

¹² The Agamemnon of *Electra* might be added to this list, but his cult does not extend beyond his immediate family.

¹³ On this secret tomb, and for a concise account of Oedipus the hero in Athens, see Kearns (1989) 50–53, 208–209.

opinions here vary, but it strikes me that the emphasis in this story is not on a reward for, or validation of, his life, but rather on his miraculously painless death and on Athens' reward for receiving a suppliant in need.¹⁴

Ajax and Heracles both had major cults in Athenian territory, cults known well to the spectators who watched Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Trachiniae*.¹⁵ Ajax was a cultic hero, but Heracles' status was variously as a god or a hero, and many of his Attic cults may have been of him as a god. A major interpretive question is whether one should assume, as part of each play's logic, that Ajax and Heracles after their deaths acquired cults, heroic for Ajax and divine for Heracles, and, if so, if these cults constitute a divine reward for the individual, validating their behaviour in the play. There is no explicit mention of such a cult in either play, though some have seen hints in that direction.¹⁶ Scholarly opinion is evenly divided as to whether we should or should not make such a cult part of the interpretation of these two plays. But even if we do accept that Sophocles intended the audience to have such a cult in mind, we should be wary of seeing it as a reward for or divine validation of Ajax's or Heracles' behaviour. Both men are, in Sophocles' depiction, characterized by a titanic anger, and are obsessed by revenge, much like the protagonist of *Oedipus at Colonus*. If the cults often attributed to Ajax and Heracles accord with their characters and follow the logic of the plays, they may well resemble that of Oedipus. Ajax and Heracles then would carry their distinctive anger to their new status; they would lack a happy and blessed or even sentient afterlife, and they, or their remains, would direct their attention to punishing their enemies. But, apparently, such were not the natures of their real cults in Athens. Ajax became one of the Athenian tribal heroes and assisted the Athenians in the battle of Salamis. Heracles assumed many benevolent roles, especially in the nurture of young men. It may have been this disparity between the Ajax and Heracles of his tragedies, which dramatized only one aspect of their myths, and the cult figures worshipped by the Athenians, that led Sophocles to eliminate or only vaguely hint at any post-play cults for Ajax and Heracles in the tragedies themselves.

¹⁴ For discussion of all aspects of Oedipus's heroization and arguments for his heroization being a validation of his life, see Markantonatos (2007) esp. 141–156.

¹⁵ On the cults of Ajax in Athens, see Kearns (1989) 141–142. On those of Heracles, see Woodford (1971).

¹⁶ The strongest case for a cult of Ajax is made by Henrichs (1993), of Heracles by Holt (1989). But see also Mikalson (1986) 92n6.

POLITICAL TRAGEDY: SOPHOCLES AND ATHENIAN HISTORY*

Sarah Ferrario

1. Introduction

Sophoclean tragedy was conceived, composed, and performed in democratic Athens, and it has often been suggested that it was also essentially *set* there.¹ Heroic mythology provided a façade of ‘safe’ remove for the audience, lest the emotional balance shift, as it apparently did in the case of the poet Phrynichus and his tragedy on the *Capture of Miletus*, too far in the direction of Aristotelian fear.² But the heroic world also furnished a rich source of paradigms and models with which tragedy could interact in order to examine contemporary Athenian concerns.³ The real distance between the audience and the discourse, therefore, was significantly narrowed by the habits of public *paideia*, which conditioned citizens to understand and embrace their roles in the *polis* through active participation, both as listeners and as speakers, in the life of the city.⁴

The Greek tragedies that survive to us, probably selected by virtue of their excellence or pedagogical value in antiquity and the Byzantine era, come exclusively from Athens, and span at most a period of just over 70 years, from a known production date of 472 BC for Aeschylus’ *Persians* to 401 BC

* I would like to express my gratitude to Andreas Markantonatos for his thorough and supportive work as editor; to William McCarthy, Leonora Neville, and Melissa Mueller for reading this project in draft and providing suggestions that improved it both in style and in substance; and to Kate Bush, who served as research assistant.

¹ On the cognitive association of tragic ideology with Athens, e.g. Ober/Strauss (1990) esp. 248; see also the references in notes 11 and 141, below.

² Rosenbloom (1993) esp. 195; on pity and fear, see Arist. *Poet.* 1453a5–6; on the fine exacted from Phrynichus for reminding the Athenians of *oikeia kaka* (perhaps to be translated as ‘troubles that belonged to them’), see Hdt. 6.21.2. The Athenians had failed to assist Miletus sufficiently during the Ionian revolt to prevent its seizure by the Persians in 494 BC.

³ Easterling (1997a) esp. 25–28. Cf. also Knox (1957) 62.

⁴ On democratic *paideia* as an embedded social and political process at Athens, see e.g. Ober (2005a) and esp. (2005b); Ober/Strauss (1990), the latter more centrally focused upon drama and both with additional references; on active audience participation, see e.g. Goldhill (2009a) 27 and the bibliography collected at n2.

for Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*.⁵ This period coincides closely with the rise and fall of the 'Athenian Empire', a tributary maritime alliance that was founded in 478 BC upon the success in the Battle of Salamis (480 BC) and was dismantled by the Spartans along with Athens' Long Walls at the end of the Peloponnesian War in 404 BC. The period of the Empire witnessed the rapid development of a radical democratic government and a famously rich blossoming of the arts.⁶ The size and the resources of imperial Athens distinguished it from other Greek *poleis* as a capital of culture and a military power, and the Athenians advertised this both to themselves and to others: much artistic production of this period, including some of the dramas, reveals a self-conscious civic pride.⁷ But Athens was by no means the only democracy in the Greek world,⁸ and its occasional demand that the factious among its allies adopt democracy as well likely helped to propagate this system still more broadly.⁹ The Athenians also shared a common language, religion, and intellectual life with most of the rest of Greece: although the various *poleis* considered themselves politically independent, their social and cultural experiences were often similar.¹⁰

There is therefore an important debate in the current scholarship as to whether Athenian democracy forms the necessary political background to tragedy, or whether the genre may more generally reflect the concerns and experiences of 'polis-dwelling Greeks'.¹¹ In one sense, the response depends upon our definition of the term 'political':¹² if 'political' refers to 'recent specific historical and governmental events', the analytical balance is more likely to tip in the direction of Athenocentrism; if 'political' is taken to mean

⁵ Sophocles died in 406/5 BC: the *Oedipus at Colonus* was staged posthumously (see note 70, below).

⁶ The term 'radical' is often used to describe the Athenian democracy following the reforms of Ephialtes in 462/1 BC: Roberts (1998²) 50 (an introductory treatment); see also Hornblower (2002³) 22–24; Meier (1993) 24–32.

⁷ See e.g. the papers collected in Boedeker/Raaflaub (1998); see also Castriota (1992).

⁸ On democracies outside of Athens that arose in the sixth and early fifth centuries BC, see Robinson (1997).

⁹ E.g. Meiggs (1972) 208–212.

¹⁰ See e.g. the survey by Beer (2004) 1–17.

¹¹ The continuum of views regarding the politicization of the Greek theatre is well outlined by Rhodes (2003) 104–106 *et passim*, who provides the phrase quoted here, arguing (at 104) that 'in the interpretation of particular plays themes have often been said to be democratic which are better seen as concerns of *polis*-dwelling Greeks in general'. Particularly important among Rhodes' references for the appreciation of the debate are Goldhill (2000) and (1990); Griffin (1999a) and (1998); add also now the methodological discussion of Wilson (2009b).

¹² See Carter (2007) and (2004).

‘the public life of a citizen,’¹³ then certain ‘political’ aspects of tragedy are more likely to appear relevant to the wider Greek population.

Sophoclean tragedy is one of the best places to explore this issue, since Sophocles, in contrast to his predecessor Aeschylus,¹⁴ tends not to place overt references to contemporary events in his plays. It has been appreciated since antiquity that Sophocles’ art seems to be conversing in some way with his environment,¹⁵ but careful analysis is required to work out these connections, and the results are not always conclusive. Certainly, there are words and ideas in the texts, and rituals in the festivals surrounding them,¹⁶ that may acknowledge specific historical developments and cultural phenomena from fifth-century Athens. But there are also important themes, recurring across the extant dramas, that address facets of *polis* life confined neither to Athens nor to democracy. One of the most visible of these is a literary and structural feature common to several of the plays: the monumental protagonist out of place in his own society.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first addresses potential direct connections between Sophocles’ plays and the Athenian historical landscape, focusing on issues involved with dating the dramas and linking them with individual people, events, and situations. The second section explores some of the most important political themes in Sophocles’ dramas and notes wider contemporary issues with which the plays seem to be engaged. In the third section, the prominent figure of the ‘Sophoclean hero’ is used to reflect upon the broader strokes of Sophoclean politics, and to suggest that the paradigm of the ‘isolated individual’ may have resonated well with the experiences of some other Greek *poleis*, even those without democratic governments. The discussion demonstrates in sum that while Sophoclean tragedy offered the richest and most detailed array of political reflections to a contemporary Athenian audience, many of the issues it raised about public life *could* have been construed as pertinent elsewhere.¹⁷ The limited available evidence on the reception of tragedy outside Athens,

¹³ Slightly adapted from Carter (2007) 54, quoting Macleod (1982b) 132: ‘A good starting point is Macleod’s definition of the political as “a concern with human beings as part of a community”’.

¹⁴ E.g. Pelling (1997a); Macleod (1982b); Podlecki (1966a).

¹⁵ See Lefkowitz (1981) 75–87, esp. 76, 80–82, 84–85.

¹⁶ On this e.g. Goldhill (1990).

¹⁷ This is a commonly shared modern interpretation of tragedy in general: cf. note 11, above, esp. Rhodes (2003); see also Hesk (2007) 72–85; Boedeker/Raaflaub (2005); Beer (2004) 1–17; Gregory (2002) esp. 145–146; Seaford (2000), responding to Griffin (1998). For a methodological reflection on the problem of historical context, see Garvie (2007).

however, suggests that such political relevance may not have been a central factor in determining the selection of dramas for wider circulation in the fourth century and beyond. In short, that Sophocles reflected the concerns of 'polis-dwelling Greeks'¹⁸ as persistently as he did likely tells us less about the poet's personal politics or about his desire for broader dissemination of his work than it does about the cultural position of fifth-century Athens within the Greek-speaking world.

2. *Sophocles and Athenian History*

A common starting-point for historically-engaged interpretations of Sophoclean drama is the biography of Sophocles himself. Our limited information comes primarily from an ancient *Life* and from other ancient testimonia preserved in later literary sources.¹⁹ Popular stories and imaginative connections to Sophocles' dramas,²⁰ however, are often the main sources of this material,²¹ and so caution is necessary when dealing with it. It is generally accepted that Sophocles served a term as an Athenian general,²² but much of the rest of the poet's formal involvement in Athenian public life remains under debate. He may have been a *hellenotamias* (a treasury-official) and a *proboulos* (a member of the agenda-setting committee for the Athenian Assembly)²³—or he may have held no further offices at all.²⁴ It has often been suggested that Sophocles reflected upon the oligarchic coup of 411 BC in his two latest plays, *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, and perhaps also in the undated *Electra*.²⁵ But he need not have held formal political

¹⁸ See note 11, above.

¹⁹ On the *Life*, see Lefkowitz (1981) 75–87, who also prints an English translation at 160–163. Other testimonies are conveniently collected in Radt (1999) 29–95. Ugolini (2000) 231–246 represents a reduced collection of the *testimonia* (presented in Italian translation) regrouped to highlight particular aspects of Sophocles' political and military career.

²⁰ Perhaps even affected on some occasions by the confusion of names: an ongoing concern is whether the 'Sophocles' mentioned in some of the *testimonia* is the poet or another individual (e.g. Avery 1973, esp. 510).

²¹ This is the case, for example, with the *Life*: see Lefkowitz (1981) viii–ix, making a general statement about the *Lives* of the poets as a group.

²² See Jameson (1971) 541n2, with ancient references, and notes 46–48, below. On the possibility that Sophocles may have been general more than once, see Westlake (1956) (*pro*) and Woodbury (1970) (*con*).

²³ Jameson (1971), with especially detailed discussion of the *hellenotamias* at 542n5.

²⁴ Avery (1973).

²⁵ Jameson (1971) presents a case for Sophocles' direct, if perhaps reluctant, involvement in the establishment of the oligarchy; Calder (1971) also believes that Sophocles likely served

office during this governmental upheaval for it to have informed his dramatic choices.

The poet's biography, then, presents few fixed points of orientation. Absolute dates from other sources are also lacking for most of the dramas. As Scodel points out in discussing *Ajax*, the state of the evidence therefore poses potential problems: 'the uncertainty of [the] dating of the play increases the difficulty of reading it politically—especially because datings often rely on political interpretations ... there is a great danger of circularity: a political reading depends on assuming a date, but then seems to confirm the date chosen'.²⁶ But Scodel also recommends a way forward: multiple criteria, including literary ones, should be employed in evaluating possible dates for the dramas, and consequently, it is implied, in examining their potential historical context.²⁷ This caution has become an important part of modern analysis. Over time, scholars have moved away from the model of a play as a collection of individual hidden references, towards a more holistic examination of its engagement with contemporary Athenian life.²⁸ This shift is discernible even in more 'allegorical' interpretations which attempt to link the dramas to specific people and actions.²⁹

Perhaps the most difficult Sophoclean play in this respect is *Trachiniae*, which lacks both a known date and 'plausible references to contemporary events'.³⁰ Easterling's review of past efforts to link this play to particular

as *proboulos* and 'naïvely voted for a dictatorial régime whose crimes and excesses he could not foresee' (173). On the coup itself, see Thuc. 8.45–98, and, for a modern historical narrative, Hornblower (2002) 172–181; on this event's potential colouring of Sophocles' dramas, see notes 63–64, 68–69, 75–76, below.

²⁶ Scodel (2003) 32.

²⁷ Scodel (2003) 32–33, noting that in the case of the *Ajax*, for example, stylistic grounds suggest a date on the earlier end of Sophocles' career, just as the apparent political resonances do.

²⁸ Said (1998) 278–280 and Bowie (1997) 39, both with additional references.

²⁹ The term 'allegorical' has more recently been applied to broader readings that extend beyond the one-to-one correspondences with which the term is commonly identified. For example, Vickers (2008) 35n5 and (1995) 42–44 and n3 acknowledges the sometimes limited acceptance of 'allegorical' readings in the current scholarship, but his own work (add to the above e.g. Vickers 1987) involves the explication of multiple allusions, even across multiple plays. An early caution against seeking 'deliberate allusions in tragedy to particular political events and situations' is Ehrenberg (1954) 11; cf. also Johansen (1962) 163, quoted by Vickers (2008) 35n5. To a certain extent the problem is one of terminology: Ehrenberg would probably not call his own work 'allegorical', but Vickers might consider it as such.

³⁰ Mitchell-Boyask (2008) 69–71 reviews previous attempts to date the drama on literary grounds.

moments in Athenian history reveals a general reluctance on the part of scholars to posit one-to-one historical correspondences, either for the characters or for the individual actions of the plot. Instead, they have tended to identify potential antagonists of Athens as inspirations for the sense of conflict in its drama, but these connections yield possible dates spanning some forty years.³¹ Recently, however, Mitchell-Boyask has argued that *Trachiniae* was produced during the Plague of Athens (430–426 BC), employing a variety of techniques to interpret Heracles both as a plague-victim and as a metonym for the Athenian Empire.³² From a literary perspective, it has been recommended that this drama does belong earlier rather than later among extant Sophoclean plays, but no firm agreement on its chronological position or its context has been reached.³³

It has been said that *Ajax*, too, ‘contains no clear references to current historical events’,³⁴ but its content, while clothed in the characteristically heroic guise of tragedy,³⁵ is nevertheless more politically disposed than that of *Trachiniae*. This is particularly evident in Ajax’s experience as a discredited military leader and in the power struggles over his burial. Some have proposed to align the drama temporally with the repercussions of the Periclean citizenship law, particularly considering that Ajax’s son Eurysaces is born of a concubine,³⁶ and to connect Ajax himself with the persons of Cimon or Themistocles, both important Athenian commanders and political leaders who fell from favour earlier in the fifth century.³⁷ But Rose has recommended that Ajax be understood more broadly, as ‘an abstracted

³¹ Easterling (1982) 23, with references: proposed connections collected by Easterling include Thasos (Ronnet), Sparta (Campbell), and Euboea (Hommel). Add to these Vickers (1995), who suggests a sustained allegory (his term) of Athenian anxieties over Sparta in the early 420s.

³² Mitchell-Boyask (2008) 67–104.

³³ See note 30, above.

³⁴ Stanford (1981³) 294, further reviewing stylistic arguments for the dating of the play at 294–296.

³⁵ E.g. Easterling (1997a) esp. 25–28; cf. also Bowie (1997).

³⁶ E.g. Robert (1964), who recommends (at 225) a date of 446/5 BC for the play and also reviews other arguments (including that of Brown 1951: see note 40, below); cf. also Meier (1993) 184. On the Periclean law of 451/50 BC, which apparently required Athenian citizens to be born of two citizen parents, see e.g. Boegehold (1994) and Patterson (1981).

³⁷ This interpretation is linked to Kamerbeek (1963²) 16–17 by Robert (1964) 225n2 (referencing the 1st ed.) and by Scodel (2003) 32n6, the latter, however, also citing Whitman (1951) 45–46 as an earlier precedent. Whitman (1951) 45n21, citing Bowra (1944) 49–50, but arguing against this interpretation on the grounds that the allegory of Ajax-as-Themistocles cannot be sustained through the drama. Even Bowra’s own suggestion of the possible inspiration, however, is very restrained.

image on a large scale of an Athenian στρατηγός', citing, among other evidence, the identity of Ajax's people (the Chorus of Salaminians whom Rose, referring to the play's performance context, calls 'Athenian sailors')³⁸ and the objection to Ajax's burial by Menelaus, who, as a Spartan king, offers a potential echo of Athens' contemporary antagonist.³⁹ This interpretation smooths out the problems of detail inherent in more specific allegories, but nevertheless permits exploration of the play's metaphorical destruction of an aristocratic world view.⁴⁰ A still broader position, that the frustrated Ajax resembles an angry Athens forced to subdue its own imperial allies,⁴¹ is potentially complicated by Ajax's suicide and the extended debate over his virtue and valour, but it does converge with other historical readings to recommend an earlier date in Sophocles' career. A number of reminiscences in the play suggest a dating in the 440s: the political conservatism which grew unfashionable under Pericles; the citizenship regulations of around 450; the Athens-Sparta conflict of the 450s and 440s;⁴² and the trouble within the Athenian Empire, which began to accelerate after 460.⁴³ Recalling Scodel's recommendation that multiple ways of thinking be brought to bear, it is worth noting that literary analyses have generally arrived at similar conclusions.⁴⁴

In the case of *Antigone*, the biographical tradition provides a possible historical connection: the ancient *Life* of Sophocles links the play's positive

³⁸ The island of Salamis, from which Ajax and his men hail, was a deme (a governmental district) of Athens by Sophocles' time: on demes in relation to the *polis*, see note 81, below.

³⁹ Rose (1995) 69–74, at 69; see also Nelli (2003) for an analysis of related leadership terminology, centring in particular around the word-root *hegem-* ('lead').

⁴⁰ Brown (1951) esp. 23 represents some shared general reflections, although his interpretation and that of Rose (1995) use fundamentally different analytical techniques, the former traditionally philological and the latter (in his own characterization, at 62) Marxist.

⁴¹ Bradshaw (1991) 114–115, 123–124. Meier (1993) 184 ventures this idea in a more limited way, but then suggests, 'more than anything, it seems likely that the play would have prompted discussions and political arguments about the relationship between the [Athenian] leaders and the people'. Kennedy (2009) 119–146 reads the character of Athena as manifesting her city and its empire onstage, but sees Ajax himself as incarnating a bygone vision of a pre-imperial Athens.

⁴² Open conflict between the two states during most of the 450s BC was so serious that it has sometimes been called by modern scholars the 'First Peloponnesian War': see Thuc. 1.102–115 and, for a modern narrative, Goldhill (2002) 26–38.

⁴³ The first ally to revolt from—and be forced back into—the Delian League that became the Athenian Empire was Naxos, according to Thucydides (1.98.4), but this problem increased over time.

⁴⁴ See Garvie (1998) 6–8, cautioning at p. 8 that 'nothing contradicts a date in the 440s, but ... certainty is impossible'. See also note 34, above.

reception with Sophocles' appointment as one of the Athenian generals.⁴⁵ This military office is affirmed in the next generation by Androtion in his *Atthis* (a local history of Attica), who dates it to 441/40 BC,⁴⁶ but the length of the campaign upon which the poet is said to have served is not clear,⁴⁷ and Sophocles may actually have served as general in a later year.⁴⁸ Further, the election of the generals would likely have *preceded* the dramatic festivals in the Spring of 441 BC, and the *Marmor Parium* (a third-century BC inscription from Paros containing a list of important events in Greek history) notes Euripides, not Sophocles, as victor in the tragedy competition, probably at the City Dionysia, for that season.⁴⁹ So while this evidence suggests a window of time for *Antigone*, it again does not furnish a specific date, and the play may be from 440 BC or even later.

Antigone has nevertheless proven perhaps the most fertile of Sophocles' dramas for political readings, both those grounded in ancient contexts and those reinterpreted for modern ones.⁵⁰ Direct reflections upon Athenian history in the play have most frequently centred upon the character of Creon and the charged issue of funeral and burial. Creon has often been perceived as a locus for thought about Pericles, whether as an echo of or as a challenge to Athens' 'first citizen'.⁵¹ Meanwhile, Antigone's unwavering desire to bury her brother may reflect a particular conflict between the privileges of the family and those of the *polis* in imperial Athens.⁵² By the mid-fifth century, male Athenian citizens who died in war were buried collectively in a state ceremony known as *patrios nomos* ('the ancestral

⁴⁵ See note 22, above, and Lefkowitz (1981) 76, 81–83, with references.

⁴⁶ Lefkowitz (1981) 76, citing *FGrHist* 324 F 38. For more information on Androtion, see Harding (1994) and (1976).

⁴⁷ Griffith (1999) 2, citing *hypoth.* 1.13–14 and (at n6) Lewis (1988) on the length of the Samian campaign.

⁴⁸ Lewis (1988) 39–43.

⁴⁹ Ed. by Jacoby (1904). Woodbury (1970) 218–223, citing *FGrHist* 239 A 60 [= *Marmor Parium*].

⁵⁰ See e.g. the chapters by Anderson and by McDonald in this volume.

⁵¹ See Podlecki (1975–1976) 15–20, reviewing several prior interpretations, including that of Ehrenberg (1954), and rejecting direct allegories of Pericles in Sophocles; cf. also Thomas (1975), who is more closely aligned with Ehrenberg and sees a nearer correspondence between the politician and the work of the poet. Meier (1993) 198–199 suggests that the conflict over city policy in *Antigone* might have been prompted by the Athenian response to Pericles. Pericles is called Athens' 'first citizen' by Thucydides at 2.65.9.

⁵² See, however, Boedeker/Raaflaub (2005) 119–122, who take careful account of the issues raised in the preceding portion of this paragraph but examine the play's political backdrop holistically, rather than allegorically.

custom'), rather than being given traditional funerals by their families.⁵³ It has been argued that *Antigone* may be responding to the public appropriation of such important rituals,⁵⁴ to the *epitaphios logos* ('funeral oration') delivered over the Athenian war dead by a prominent politician,⁵⁵ and perhaps even specifically to a recent public funeral for those lost in the bloody Athenian subjection of a rebellious ally, Samos, in 440/39 BC.⁵⁶

Oedipus Tyrannus begins with a terrible plague. Sophocles does not overtly link it with the Athenian plague of the early years of the Peloponnesian War (Thuc. 2.47.3–54.5), but as Knox points out, plague is not a manifestation of the curse upon Thebes in the traditional myth of Oedipus and may therefore have been the poet's insertion. Knox suggests that Sophocles is acknowledging not only the epidemic of 430–428 BC, but also, given some phrases in the first choral *stasimon*, a known second outbreak in 427–426 BC. For this reason, he recommends a date for *Oedipus Tyrannus* of 425 BC, given that the tragedy seems to be mocked by Aristophanes in his *Knights* of 424 BC.⁵⁷ Beyond the plague, other historicizing interpretations of the play have largely centred around the monumentality of the Oedipus character. Pericles has been suggested as a natural analogue⁵⁸ for the towering ruler who calls his citizens his 'children' (*OT* 1), but Oedipus has also been read as a metonym for Athens itself,⁵⁹ and as part of a larger-scale reference, constructed from multiple allusions throughout the play, to Alcibiades.⁶⁰

⁵³ Foley (1993) offers a convenient review of this issue as background to the study of tragic lamentation at 103–107. To the more specific references there, add also esp. Clairmont (1983), Jacoby (1944).

⁵⁴ Tyrrell/Bennett (1998), a close reading of the entire play; cf. also the essays collected in Patterson (2006a).

⁵⁵ On this tradition, described at Thuc. 2.34.6–8, see esp. Loraux (1986). On the play's use of vocabulary and structures from the *epitaphios* to illustrate the gap between public and private commemorative acts, see also Bennett/Tyrrell (1990); cf. Tyrrell (1999) 149.

⁵⁶ Tyrrell (1999) 152.

⁵⁷ Knox (1956) esp. 136–137, 140–147. The authority of this argument, simplified in its summary here, has recently been noted by Mitchell-Boyask (2008) 56–57.

⁵⁸ See the references collected by Vickers (2008) 35–36 and the review of approaches provided by Podlecki (1975–1976) 20–22; Ehrenberg (1954) 51–98 examines Creon in *Antigone* and Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannos* as embodying different facets of contemporary views of Pericles.

⁵⁹ Knox (1957).

⁶⁰ Vickers (2008) esp. 34–46. For more on Alcibiades in tragedy, cf. the discussion of *Philoctetes* at notes 66–68, below; for more information on the broader reception of Alcibiades at Athens, see Gribble (1999), Ellis (1989) is a general biography.

Electra, like *Trachiniae*, has received literary and socio-cultural readings far more frequently than historical ones.⁶¹ The lack of a firm date for this drama and the deep submersion of its politics have hindered allegorical, or even allusive interpretations.⁶² However, Konstan has recently ventured that the structure of *Electra* may broadly reflect political motions surrounding the restoration of the Athenian democracy following the oligarchic coup of 411 BC, noting that the play's action builds towards the overthrow of an 'illegitimate regime' through the assistance of an exile.⁶³ In this interpretation, the fact that Aegisthus is slain *after* Clytaemestra, a reversal of the order of events in the traditional myth, serves 'to divert attention from the pollution associated with the killing of kin and to highlight the political character of the murders'.⁶⁴

Sophocles' (probably) last two extant dramas have dates recorded in their *hypotheses*. *Philoctetes* was performed under the archonship of Glaukippos (410/09 BC, with the performance in the early Spring of 409 BC).⁶⁵ Two related matters recur in historical interpretations of this drama: the oligarchic coup of 411 BC and the figure of Alcibiades. It has been both asserted and denied that Philoctetes himself is an echo of Alcibiades:⁶⁶ the character, like the historical figure, is an exile perceived as the key to victory in a major war, but Philoctetes utterly lacks Alcibiades' political ambitions, which seem rather to emerge in Odysseus.⁶⁷ This complexity has persuaded some scholars against reading the play as a one-to-one allegory.⁶⁸ In his study of the drama as a potential response to the coup, for example, Calder argues that Sophocles uses the repeated deception of the upright hero Philoctetes to

⁶¹ Both of these plays, for example, are extremely important for the study of gender and of family relations in classical Athens (see, for example, the chapter by Mossman in this volume), but these conditions, while certainly affected by historical events, were altered less rapidly by them than were the volatile political and military situations of the era.

⁶² See e.g. Vickers (2008) 4–5, but further argument is offered simply by the body of Sophoclean scholarship, which provides far fewer historicizing readings of this drama than perhaps of any other Sophoclean work save the *Trachiniae*: see Ierulli (1999) 478.

⁶³ Konstan (2008), noting (at p. 79) that Orestes would then be taken to represent the Athenian democratic faction based at Samos that refused to recognize the oligarchic government of the Four Hundred. For more on Sophocles' potential reaction to the coup, see note 25, above.

⁶⁴ Konstan (2008) 78.

⁶⁵ See Jebb (1908) 4–5, including the text of the second *hypothesis*, from which this information comes.

⁶⁶ Philoctetes as Alcibiades: Vickers (1987), citing (172n7) *contra*: Jameson (1956), with earlier references.

⁶⁷ Debnar (2005) 18, with references and additional bibliography.

⁶⁸ E.g. Calder (1971) 170, citing Jameson (1956).

reflect upon the contemporary loss of dependable values and social *mores*, and perhaps even upon the poet's own regret at being 'deceived' into backing the temporary oligarchy.⁶⁹

Oedipus at Colonus was produced by Sophocles' grandson and namesake during the archonship of Mikon (402/1 BC), the poet himself having died several years before.⁷⁰ Given the play's particular emphasis on Athens itself, however, an even more precise date of composition would be desirable. July, 406 BC witnessed the Battle of Arginousai, after which the victorious Athenian naval commanders failed to retrieve their dead and wounded:⁷¹ they were subjected to a group trial before the democratic Assembly, and the *dêmos* 'condemned the generals who took part in the battle, eight in all; and the six who were in Athens were put to death'.⁷² A lingering question about *Oedipus at Colonus*, then, is whether the play's composition was coloured by the unnecessary human losses after Arginousai and the subsequent distasteful failure of democratic processes.⁷³

Set in an idealized vision of the *polis* ruled by the Athenian mythological hero Theseus,⁷⁴ *Oedipus at Colonus* has been read as a reaction to the coup of 411 BC, whether the utopian world of the drama is viewed as an apologia for the temporary displacement of the Athenian democracy,⁷⁵ or as an expression of regret that the oligarchy did not hold.⁷⁶ Alcibiades has also, again, been detected in some of its characters.⁷⁷ But because of the play's known position at the end of both the poet's life and the Peloponnesian War, it has most frequently been identified as an old man's

⁶⁹ Calder (1971) 170–174; cf. also note 25, above.

⁷⁰ See Jebb (1907) 4–5, including the text of the second *hypothesis*, from which this information comes.

⁷¹ 'Despite their desire to carry out these measures', Xenophon reports, 'the wind and a heavy storm which came on prevented them' (*Hell.* 1.6.35, transl. Brownson 1918).

⁷² The trial is treated by Xenophon at *Hell.* 1.7.1–34; the quotation here is from 1.7.34, transl. Brownson (1918).

⁷³ See Markantonatos (2007) 35–39 (outlining the general historical context rather than a specific series of events); and Edmunds (1996) 87 and n3, citing the especially detailed study by Tanner (1966) of the ancient evidence for the chronology.

⁷⁴ E.g. Blundell (1993) esp. 299–303, from whose title comes my use of the adjective 'idealized'.

⁷⁵ Edmunds (1996) 87–100. See note 69, above, on a similar interpretation ventured for *Philoctetes*.

⁷⁶ Markantonatos (2007) 13 and n9 disagrees with this interpretation, but offers a useful collection of several variations upon it.

⁷⁷ Markantonatos (2007) n63, citing three examples: Knox (1983) 26, an Oedipus reference, Blundell (1993) 304 citing in turn Knox (1983) 22, both on Polyneices, and Vickers (2005), on Oedipus (the latter interpretation is now accessible via Vickers 2008).

wistful reflection—whether finally optimistic or pessimistic—upon his city's decline from imperial glory, and about the need for moral compass and peace.⁷⁸ *Oedipus at Colonus* is for many modern readers a play about Athens: Theseus, perhaps serving as a metonym for his city,⁷⁹ prevails in his conflict with Creon, the representative of Athens' contemporary enemy, Thebes.⁸⁰ Theseus' decisions, made for the good of his people, prove to be the right ones, and in the end the heroic leader settles as the heroic visitor to Sophocles' own deme, his home district of greater Athens.⁸¹ In a manner not dissimilar to the conclusion of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, the mythological past is elided with the Athenian present, bridged by the blessings of a cult newly founded in the drama but ancient in the classical city.⁸²

3. *Political Tragedy*

'Historical' interest in Sophoclean tragedy extends beyond recollections of particular people, events, and conditions to embrace certain contemporary issues in the public life of the citizen.⁸³ Several of these themes receive attention from the poet across multiple dramas.⁸⁴

3.1. *Paideia: The Sophoclean Making of a Male Citizen*

Because Neoptolemus is explicitly a *young* man in *Philoctetes*, his case has provoked the richest discussion of *paideia*, the 'education', 'bringing-up', or perhaps 'cultivation towards mature understanding' of those in need of

⁷⁸ E.g. Markantonatos (2007) 168–193; Easterling (1997a); Blundell (1993).

⁷⁹ See recently Mills (1997) 160–185. Theseus has less frequently been interpreted as a potential Pericles figure, perhaps due in part to the gap in time (Pericles predeceased Sophocles by more than twenty years), although the suggestion has been ventured: e.g. Wallace (1979) 46–47, citing (n21) Rosenmeyer (1952) 101; cf. also Calder (2005) 168.

⁸⁰ E.g. Whitman (1951) 209–210. But compare Easterling (1989) 14, who notes that at *OC* 919–923, Theseus acknowledges that Creon's immoral ways are not endemic to his Theban origins.

⁸¹ On the religious, civic, and military relationships of the rural demes (like Colonus) and the countryside to the *polis* as a whole in tragedy, see e.g. Krummen (1993) esp. 191–203.

⁸² On the relationship between *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Eumenides*, e.g. Calder (2005) 165–168.

⁸³ See note 13, above.

⁸⁴ On 'political' elements in tragedy, see Carter (2007) and (2004), whose recommendations have shaped the themes selected here; on the centrality of political affairs to ancient Greek conceptions of 'history', see Momigliano (1978) esp. 3–6, (1972); Rahn (1971); Starr (1968) 91–94.

experience. As Carlevale shows, Neoptolemus receives abundant guidance during the drama, first from Odysseus, his teacher in deception;⁸⁵ later from Philoctetes, his *de facto* (if not always intentional) instructor in virtuous behaviour; and finally from Heracles when the hero appears at the conclusion of the play to resolve the stalemate.⁸⁶ Neoptolemus' experiences with deceptive speech, and his concomitant difficulty in understanding correct ethics, may recall a tension in the fifth century between older and newer modes of preparation for public life in the *polis*. During this time, traditionalists advocated the *symposium* and the *gymnasium* as venues for the proper socialization of élites, but increasing numbers of young men instead sought out rhetorical training, characterized by its detractors as venal and amoral.⁸⁷

The rites of passage to adulthood represent another important phase in the development of the mature citizen, and these, too, seem to be acknowledged in Sophocles' plays. Vidal-Naquet sees *Philoctetes* as reflecting the Athenian *ephebeia*, the initiation of post-adolescent males into the ranks of the hoplites, emphasizing Neoptolemus' departure into the uncivilized wild and subsequent return, his passage from youthful immaturity to full understanding, and his arming for battle.⁸⁸ Neoptolemus, however, is by no means the only young character in Sophoclean tragedy who learns by either experiencing or observing suffering:⁸⁹ ritual passages to adulthood have also been identified for Hyllus in *Trachiniae*, for Orestes in *Electra*, and for Haemon in *Antigone*.⁹⁰ These interpretations have yielded more anthropological readings of the 'less political' dramas, *Trachinae* and *Electra*; they have focused upon contemporary intellectual issues and politics in the case of *Antigone*.

The processes of maturation and education experienced by tragic characters may also be read as a metaphor for the *paideia* offered by tragedy itself to its audience.⁹¹ This kind of 'metatheatrical' reading is another way of connecting tragedy to its historical and political context. It essentially

⁸⁵ On Odysseus as teacher, see also Craik (1980), calling (at 253) the sustained reference to sophism in this character an 'allegory'.

⁸⁶ See e.g. Carlevale (2000) 31, 53–55.

⁸⁷ Carlevale (2000) esp. 28–31, calling this clash of paideutic models a 'crisis of education'. A comic reflection of these differences, as Carlevale notes *passim*, is Aristophanes' *Clouds*, produced in 423 BC.

⁸⁸ Vidal-Naquet (1990a).

⁸⁹ The earliest extant reference to 'learning through suffering' is Aesch. *Ag.* 177, *πάθει μάθος*.

⁹⁰ Respectively, Pozzi (1999); Gasti (2001); Barker (2006). Siewert (1977) 105–107 reads resonances of the ephebic oath in Creon's address to Haemon at *Ant.* 663–671.

⁹¹ Carlevale (1999) argues that this is indeed the case. For more on tragic *paideia*, see the chapter by Gregory in this volume.

argues that tragic drama comments on its own relationship to its audience, as citizens in the real (political) world.⁹² Lada-Richards has employed this technique in reading the *paideia* of *Philoctetes*, suggesting that just as Neoptolemus is confronted with difficult choices, so the audience must decide whether or not to sympathize with him, and in their own decision-making they can, in a way, appreciate his struggle first-hand.⁹³

3.2. *Sophism and Rhetoric*

Sophocles is also interested in the powers and the dangers of persuasive speech beyond its role in the training of the young, and this theme emerges particularly strongly from metatheatrical and contextual readings of the plays. Falkner's analysis of *Philoctetes*, for example, considers how a drama that emphasizes deception may reflect upon the position that tragedy occupies within its society. He concludes, from the internal theatrical and performative qualities of the text (including but not limited to the efforts to ensnare Philoctetes), that the genre itself can mislead; but the appropriate resolution of its narrative problem at least provides the audience with useful truths.⁹⁴ In a brief study of Ajax's 'deception speech' (*Aj.* 646–692), Pelling points out that its delivery blurs the boundaries between drama and reality. As the scene is performed with the character alone onstage, the true addressee is left unclear, and the audience may be metaphorically drawn into 'conversation'. Adding to this effect, the audience members see Ajax's fellow characters misreading his true intentions, but as listeners to this ambiguous speech, they themselves are uncertain as to how to interpret his words.⁹⁵

In broader contexts, since persuasive speech was deeply embedded in Greek public life, it is common to find formalized rhetorical structures throughout tragedy, in places where they may have occurred in the real world.⁹⁶ Trial-scenes resonate easily between stage and city: the delivery of speeches in court was literally a performance, and tragic *agônes* (argument-scenes) often provoke recollections of legal debates.⁹⁷ Political

⁹² See Lada-Richards (1998) 13.

⁹³ Lada-Richards (1998) 13.

⁹⁴ Falkner (1998) esp. 55.

⁹⁵ Pelling (2005) 93–95.

⁹⁶ Bers (1994) 178; cf. also Halliwell (1997). For a more detailed treatment of rhetoric in specifically Sophoclean tragedy, see the chapter by Worman in this volume.

⁹⁷ See e.g. Slater (1995). Rose (1995) 65–69 maps out the structure of *Ajax* as a kind of trial.

deliberations, too, can be imitated on the tragic stage, particularly as actions past and future come under dispute.⁹⁸ But as Halliwell points out, it is important not to assume that the tragedians' employment of argumentative structures and language was the unconscious result of cultural conditioning. Rather, their use of rhetoric represents a deliberate engagement with contemporary expectations about public discourse, and they could—and did—exploit real cultural concerns about the power of persuasion.⁹⁹ Segal, for example, notes that Orestes in *Electra* seems to give voice to sophistic utilitarianism when he states that gain is the ultimate determinant of the value of speech, and that this sentiment resonates strongly with the attitude—and the words—of Odysseus in *Philoctetes*.¹⁰⁰

3.3. *Law and Justice*

The 'justice of the gods' is by no means entirely separable from concepts of practical justice,¹⁰¹ but given the historical focus of this chapter I deal here with readings that have highlighted the relationships between Sophoclean tragedy and the laws and procedures of classical Athens.¹⁰²

Even the dramas judged the least political among Sophocles' works have invited legal and judicial interpretations. In the case of *Electra*, the *lex talionis* is most strongly present on the surface, but, as Juffras notes, *Electra* and Orestes are also displaced from their rightful places as rulers, and justice within the family is therefore intimately connected with the establishment of legitimate government.¹⁰³ Further, the language of the drama contains frequent allusions to political charges, legal processes,¹⁰⁴ and other situations from the real world.¹⁰⁵ In interpreting *Trachiniae*, Hall emphasizes the process of deliberation, noting that this activity was an integral part of legal

⁹⁸ Halliwell (1997) 125.

⁹⁹ Halliwell (1997) esp. 123, 126, 130–131, 141.

¹⁰⁰ Segal (1966) 510–511, quoting *El.* 59–61. Gil (2004) 141–142 has further suggested that Aegisthus' language and behaviour in the same play are also sophistic.

¹⁰¹ Tessitore (2003) in reading *Philoctetes*, for example, sees divine justice (as embodied by the immovable ideals of Philoctetes) and human justice (in the utilitarian view of Odysseus) as coming into conflict and then being harmonized in the *paideia* of Neoptolemus.

¹⁰² Garner (1987) 95–130 represents a useful general study of (his title) 'law and drama'.

¹⁰³ Juffras (1991) 105 and *passim*. See also the more generalized study of the family-polis connection in *Electra* by MacLeod (2001) and the response to it by Finglass (2005).

¹⁰⁴ See Gil (2004), who sees the drama as being more significantly about human justice than about divine justice.

¹⁰⁵ Juffras (1991) also identifies a particular passage in the play as referring to the cult of the Tyrannicides, and suggests that this connection recommends a more politicized reading of the drama than is conventionally performed.

and political procedures at Athens. So Deianeira, in determining what to do about Heracles, resembles the individual citizen in council, and, at the same time, the self-consciously reflective Athenian *dêmos*.¹⁰⁶

More specific legal resonances have been detected in some of Sophocles' other plays. Rose, with others, sees the structure of *Ajax* as recalling the organization of a trial,¹⁰⁷ and Garner offers the further reminder that Ajax's predicament in the drama is provoked in part by another pseudo-legal decision—the awarding of Achilles' arms to Odysseus—before the action of the play even began.¹⁰⁸ Oedipus' quests and questions in *Oedipus Tyrannus* have also prompted trial-analyses.¹⁰⁹ Of particular interest in this drama is the manifestation of tragic irony *through* the legal process, where Oedipus as prosecutor of the murderer of Laius is actually indicting himself both for that and for a far greater 'crime'. But perhaps none of Sophocles' plays has provoked so many conversations about justice as has *Antigone*,¹¹⁰ which openly discusses the law and whether it ought to be obeyed, and in which individual structures and phrases echo official statutes and trial procedures.¹¹¹

A particular legal question that arises in *Oedipus at Colonus* is the issue of membership in the *polis*. Scholars remain divided as to whether Oedipus in this play is received into Athens as a full citizen or as a metic ('a legitimate foreign resident'), since this is not explicitly indicated in the text. A comparison to Sophocles' Philoctetes, who is finally reconciled back into his own 'citizen' body (the Greek army), has been adduced to suggest that Oedipus is implicitly granted Athenian citizenship.¹¹² But a metic Oedipus, capable of potential harm and nevertheless welcomed into the city, could be seen as a meaningful lesson for tragic spectators about the productive contributions of non-Athenians to *polis* life.¹¹³ It is also possible that Oedipus actually *seeks* (metaphorically) formal citizenship, while ultimately

¹⁰⁶ Hall (2009) esp. 89–94.

¹⁰⁷ Rose (1995) esp. 66–69; see note 97, above.

¹⁰⁸ Garner (1987) 109.

¹⁰⁹ In detail, Greiffenhagen (1966), who at 151 rightly cautions, however, that the connections between *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the Athenian legal process are often ones of thought rather than of explicit detail.

¹¹⁰ Garner (1987) 102–105, 110.

¹¹¹ For an analysis of these, e.g. Scabuzzo (1999). On the possibility that *Antigone* may represent a response to recent legislative developments in Athens, see Cerri (1979) 19–32.

¹¹² Knox (1983) 21, cited by Vidal-Naquet (1990b) 342–343 and n42 in order to dispute this argument.

¹¹³ Bakewell (1999), citing at 55nn35–36 Vidal-Naquet (1986) [= a different edition of Vidal-Naquet (1990b) published in *Métis* 1 (1986)].

remaining a metic.¹¹⁴ Public honours had long been granted to foreigners at Athens, with the highest possible award being Athenian citizenship; but special acknowledgements seem to have been more limited for citizens earlier in the fifth century, likely in the interest of maintaining the veneer of equality established by the democracy. Later in the fifth century, however, and certainly by the earlier fourth century, this situation shifts, and individual Athenian citizens are more frequently honoured by name in public.¹¹⁵ Sophocles' Oedipus, then, whether viewed as a citizen or as a foreigner, may in the real world have been symbolically eligible for the kinds of attentions paid him by the timeless version of Athens in the play.

3.4. *Funeral and Burial*

Funerals and burials are frequently construed today as social and religious rituals; in fifth-century Greece, however, they were ethically and politically charged as well.¹¹⁶ The denial of burial to an enemy, as Rosivach shows, then invoked traditional moral codes alongside contemporary ones. From epic poetry we know the tradition of the mutilation or exposure of the enemy corpse; the historical age brought the law that traitors were not entitled to proper burial. Polyneices in *Antigone* is therefore subject to a double sentence to exposure that bridges the gap between the heroic age and the real world, a sentence that proves legitimate but not ultimately just.¹¹⁷

The issues of who should bury and how the dead should be commemorated were also political questions in Sophocles' day. As noted in the discussion of *Antigone* in the first section of this chapter,¹¹⁸ the ritual of *patrios nomos*, which denied private burials to the Athenian war dead, may have contributed to the depiction of Antigone's struggle for the rights to Polyneices' body.¹¹⁹ Along similar lines, it has been suggested that the *epitaphios logos*, the civic funerary speech, may be understood as a public, masculinized replacement for private, familial lamentation, the essential province of women in the ancient Greek world.¹²⁰ But Ierulli and Foley have shown

¹¹⁴ Vidal-Naquet (1990b) 351–353.

¹¹⁵ E.g. Ferrario (2006) 86–88, 96–98, with references.

¹¹⁶ Hall (2009) 90 calls 'transparently political' the question as to 'whether or not a man perceived as a traitor should be given a burial (the issue in *Ajax* and *Antigone*)'.

¹¹⁷ Rosivach (1983) esp. 208.

¹¹⁸ See note 53, above.

¹¹⁹ On the relationship of this issue to practices outside of Athens, see note 148, below.

¹²⁰ E.g. Derderian (2001) 161–175, citing also (p. 163n12) on this point Loraux (1986) 24, 44–50, 54–55, 201.

that Sophocles' 'lamenting virgins' (Ierulli's term), Antigone and Electra, still pose perceived threats to the dominant political orders in their *poleis*, represented by Creon and by Clytaemestra and Aegisthus, respectively. For Foley, Antigone's and Electra's *public* lamentations expose injustice and question the rule of oppressive regimes, not only in their content but in the very fact of their openness.¹²¹ For Ierulli, Antigone's use of political language to characterize Creon as a tyrant would have resonated strongly with an Athenian audience who saw the Tyrannicides as the essential founders of their democracy. And Electra's strong imagination of herself and Chrysothemis as agents of vengeance also casts them as heroic forces, particularly given that Electra believes Orestes is dead for much of the time that she speaks in this way. In both of these situations, traditional feminine lamentation is used as an impetus to real political action, mapped onto the familiar *topos* of tyrannicide.¹²²

4. *The Sophoclean Hero and the 'Great Men' of Classical Greece*

If there is any one political theme that emerges more regularly than others across Sophocles' extant plays, however, it is that of the complex, sometimes even painful relationship of the isolated, monumental individual to the group to which he is supposed to belong.¹²³

Ajax depicts its protagonist's distancing from and reintegration into his community, mirrored in the journey of the character's physical body from insanity and pollution in life, through death, to his burial and recognition as a hero.¹²⁴ Antigone is isolated from the citizen community of her *polis* in several ways. In one possible reading, she represents the interests of the individual within the private, familial sphere, as opposed to the anonymous collectivity mandated by the Athenian democratic state—or simply to the institutionalized world of public law.¹²⁵ The political aspect of Electra's

¹²¹ Foley (1993) 111–113.

¹²² Ierulli (1999) esp. 482–484, 491–492 (disagreeing with some of the interpretations of Juffras: cf. notes 103 and 105, above), 495–496.

¹²³ Knox (1964) offers an influential description of the figure of the monumental 'Sophoclean hero'. In the heroic-mythological world of tragedy (cf. note 35, above), the group from which the individual is isolated may be represented as anything from an army to a *polis*.

¹²⁴ See e.g. Sorum (1986). Rose (1995) views Ajax's isolation as reflecting class conflict in contemporary Athens, a reading with which my interpretations here broadly agree.

¹²⁵ See the references collected by Sorum (1982) 205n18, updated by those in Roselli (2006) 158–159nn1–2, and adding e.g. Boedeker/Raaflaub (2005) 119–122; Holt (1999).

experience is less overt, but her isolation both from her family and from her community is a major theme of the play, and she, like Antigone, struggles for reconciliation on terms that will have consequences both for her clan and for her *polis*.¹²⁶

The gap between the interests of the individual and those of the community, as Goldhill points out, is also cast into high relief in *Philoctetes*, where the hero with the outcome of the Trojan War in his hands has been rejected by the Greek army that now desperately needs to recover his loyalty. But another kind of isolation is represented by Neoptolemus, who questions the 'civic' demands that he has been dispatched to fulfil.¹²⁷ Christ observes that both Philoctetes and Neoptolemus are being 'recruited' for duties against which they struggle, and notes that the military needs of the group, supported by Heracles, are ultimately fulfilled for the sake of the common good, a theme that can be observed in other tragedies as well. For either practical or ethical reasons, then, the call of the state tends to prevail, both onstage and in real life.¹²⁸

Sophocles' two Oedipus plays bridge the distance between the communities of Thebes and Athens.¹²⁹ Zeitlin has argued that Thebes, frequently present on the tragic stage in the dramatized stories of the house of Laius, provides a way for Athens to think about its own identity, by furnishing a 'negative model ... [for] proper management of city, society, and self'.¹³⁰ But the intractably independent Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, as noted above, has also been read as the very embodiment of the Athenian spirit.¹³¹ It is perhaps fitting, then, that in *Oedipus at Colonus*, the individual exile from one citizen group approaches another and asks to join it: the mortal Oedipus is a suppliant, at the city's mercy, and the deceased Oedipus becomes a hero, the city's benefactor.¹³² In Oedipus' negotiations and acceptance into

¹²⁶ See note 103, above.

¹²⁷ Goldhill (1990) 118–125, contrasting Neoptolemus' attitude with the 'assuredness' (122) of the ceremony at the City Dionysia that marked the acceptance of Athens' grown war orphans into the ranks of the citizen hoplites.

¹²⁸ Christ (2004) esp. 50–51, 54–55.

¹²⁹ This is one of the central points of discussion in Vidal-Naquet (1990b), although he focuses only upon *Oedipus at Colonus*.

¹³⁰ Zeitlin (1990) at 131. It is important to note that Zeitlin's examination of Thebes extends beyond Sophoclean drama to reference other tragedies, as well.

¹³¹ Knox (1957) esp. 59–77; cf. the discussion at note 59, above.

¹³² Vidal-Naquet (1990b) 329; Burian (1974) esp. 408–409; cf. Wallace (1979) 40, emphasizing that suppliant status is focused on the individual, while 'savior' status (from Burian's title) 'implies a more socially inclusive context', including concern for the wider community.

Athens, then, Sophocles is able to present a vision of his *polis* peacefully integrating an extraordinary—and potentially problematic—individual into its community.

Metatheatrical readings of the relationship between the individual and the citizen group in *Oedipus Tyrannus* are also possible. For Euben, Oedipus' commitment to the public disclosure of his identity (and, later, of his blindness) combines with the imagery of sight and viewing deployed throughout the play to yield a potent reminder of the power of tragedy to create civic identity amongst its spectators.¹³³ Finally, the individual-group theme can be extended beyond the stage and into the real world of the tragic festivals. Wilson, for example, has suggested that the *choregeia*, the financial production of a tragedy, reflects the socioeconomic and political tension inherent between the select few individuals who could serve as *choregoi* and the larger group of ordinary audience members. The *choregeia* transformed a particular citizen's wealth into a productive resource for the entire *polis*, but it also permitted him to stage a performance that both literally and figuratively advertised his elite status.¹³⁴ And Goldhill sees the difficult relationship of the Sophoclean hero to his community as being especially meaningful when it is contrasted with the 'civic ideology' celebrated in the opening rituals of the City Dionysia.¹³⁵

4.1. 'Great Men' in Athens

By the mid-fifth century, Athenian politics contained a number of elaborate safeguards designed to check the ascent of individuals into positions of excessive power.¹³⁶ Since Athens was organized as a direct democracy, each citizen possessed a vote in the legislative Assembly. Most offices, including the committees that held executive authority, were assigned by lot and distributed equally across artificial divisions of the citizen body called 'tribes' that were designed to separate old geographic and clan alliances. The possibility of ostracism faced those for whom the *polis* had become an uncomfortable fit for their ambitions. And a variety of laws and social norms converted excess wealth into mandatory public services called *liturgiai* (the

¹³³ Euben (1990) 96–129, esp. 108–109.

¹³⁴ Wilson (1997); for more extensive discussion of these issues, see Wilson (2000) *passim*.

¹³⁵ Goldhill (1990) 114–125, addressing *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* (cf. also note 127, above) as case studies, but with references to earlier work on other plays.

¹³⁶ Roberts (1998²) is an accessible introduction to the basic operations of the Athenian democracy. More advanced information may be found in e.g. the collections edited by Rhodes (2004) and by Ober/Hedrick (1996).

choregeia was one; fitting out a warship was another) and may have curbed some extravagances in personal display.

Thucydides could nevertheless say of Periclean Athens that 'what was nominally (λόγῳ) a democracy became in effect (ἔργῳ) government by the first citizen'.¹³⁷ This tension between surface appearance and essential reality was endemic to the political conditions of the time: although all citizens were nominally equal, those of better birth, with greater access to wealth and education, had the most eloquent and persuasive voices in the Assembly, as well as the training and experience to hold one of the very few remaining elected offices in the democracy: the ten generalships, one for each tribe. Such eminent individuals were not only inevitable, but necessary for the effective operation of the state.¹³⁸

But these individuals could pose problems, too. Pericles is remembered as an effective leader, but part of his success, as Thucydides notes (2.65.8–9), may have depended on his special ability to suggest to the *dêmos* that it was really the party in control, rather than him. Other leaders of fifth-century Athens, by contrast, had significant problems reconciling their own interests with those of the *dêmos*. Themistocles, Miltiades, Cleon, Nicias, Alcibiades, and others found themselves at odds with Athenian norms of equality, with the mandates or preferences of the popular Assembly, or even with the democratic process itself.¹³⁹ In several cases, the civic conflicts in which such men participated were even coloured by the ancient Greek historians with what many scholars have considered to be recognizable touches of tragedy.¹⁴⁰

4.2. *Politics and Popularity: Tragedy and the Wider Greek World*

Since the tension between the eminent individual and his people was essentially omnipresent in democratic Athens,¹⁴¹ it is not surprising that so many

¹³⁷ Thuc. 2.65.9, transl. Crawley, modified.

¹³⁸ On the relationships between such leaders and the Athenian *dêmos*, see Ober (1989); cf. also Connor (1971).

¹³⁹ From the earlier extant ancient historians alone, e.g. on Themistocles, Hdt. 5.32, 8.3, 109–112, 123; Thuc. 1.135.3, 138.1–6; on Miltiades, Hdt. 6.132–136; on Cleon, Thuc. 4.28.1–3; on Nicias, Thuc. 7.14.1–4, 48.3–4; on Alcibiades, Thuc. 6.29.1–3, 53.1, 8.47.1, 82.2; Xen. *Hell.* 1.4.11–23 [see the interpretation of this passage by Due (1991) esp. 46], 1.5.16–17.

¹⁴⁰ On tragic influences in the historians, see e.g. Griffin (2006); Chiasson (2003); Rood (1998); Cornford (1907). *Contra* on Thucydides: Macleod (1983a).

¹⁴¹ See Ober (1989); on reflections of this tension in drama in particular, see e.g. Rose (1995); Goldhill (1990); Ober/Strauss (1990).

protagonists of Sophocles' extant dramas might dwell physically or metaphorically apart in 'splendid isolation',¹⁴² or come into such bitter conflict with their respective 'citizen' groups. But this same political pressure seems also to have been present in other *poleis*, including those whose governments were not democratic. In Sparta, both Lysander and Agesilaus found themselves at odds with the authority of their city and sought opportunities for personal accomplishment abroad;¹⁴³ in Thebes, the striking rise of Epaminondas seems to have provoked envy from fellow élites and even an inscription that claims esteem both for Epaminondas' competitors and for the Thebans as a whole following the Battle of Leuctra (371 BC).¹⁴⁴ The behaviour of Lysander, Agesilaus, and Epaminondas may further have been inspired in part by the experiences of the Spartan general Brasidas in life and in death during the Peloponnesian War, when he received individual recognition for his personal achievements at a level that verged upon the heroic.¹⁴⁵ And in early fifth-century Greece, Kowalzig has argued, drama and performative poetry seem to have served as important tools of negotiation between the Sicilian tyrants and their respective Greek populaces, 'not least by blurring in the medium of performance the memory of individual family members' achievements'.¹⁴⁶

The monumental heroes of Sophoclean tragedy, then, may have appeared politically relevant even in other Greek states, both during and after Sophocles' lifetime. The same is true of the more general political issues raised in the second section of this chapter; after all, neither sophistic education nor its discourse were native Athenian products,¹⁴⁷ and concerns about the civic right to burial have emerged from evidence belonging, for example, to Sparta, Boeotia, and Megara.¹⁴⁸ The question that remains is whether these possible resonances seem to have affected contemporary and later responses to Sophoclean drama outside Athens.

¹⁴² On the coinage and history of this phrase, see Cannon (2009) s.v. *splendid isolation*.

¹⁴³ There are many passages from the historians that could be cited here. I select only a few: Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.1–5, 5.3.24 on Agesilaus; Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.16–18 (as discussed by Proietti 1987, 38–39), 3.4.1–2 on Lysander. Cf. also Cartledge (1987) 126–127.

¹⁴⁴ *IG VII* 2462, ed. with commentary Rhodes/Osborne (2003) 150–151 no. 30. See also Shrimpton (1971) 313.

¹⁴⁵ McCauley (1993) 244n596, citing Cartledge (1987) 85 on Lysander (see Cartledge 1987, 77–98 on the rivalry between Lysander and Agesilaus); cf. Ferrario (2007) on Epaminondas. See Thuc. 4.121.1, 5.11.1; Currie (2005) 120–157 and (2002); McCauley (1993) 241–243.

¹⁴⁶ Kowalzig (2008) esp. 140–141.

¹⁴⁷ See Kerferd (1981) for an overview.

¹⁴⁸ See Low (2006) on Sparta; Low (2003) on Boeotia and Megara.

The details of Athenian history and culture which Sophocles seems to have acknowledged in his plays would likely have had limited impact upon non-Athenian audiences. But many of the other political concerns reviewed here—the growing gap between traditional and sophistic education, the power of deceptive speech, the relationship between law and justice, the social control of the right to burial, and the position of the eminent individual within his citizen group—would have spoken nearly as effectively to *polis* life outside of Athens as they did within it, and much of this discussion would have remained relevant over a longer period of time.

These connections may initially seem well in keeping with what is known of the growing popularity of tragedy beyond Attica in the fifth and especially the fourth centuries BC.¹⁴⁹ Sophocles, however, seems to have received less attention in the vase-paintings of Magna Graecia (one of the most substantial bodies of evidence for theatrical reception beyond Athens) than Aeschylus and especially Euripides.¹⁵⁰ As Taplin reminds us, ancient tradition suggests that connections were forged between Aeschylus and Sicily, and between Euripides and Macedon, but Sophocles seems to have focused his career exclusively upon his own *polis*.¹⁵¹

Without additional evidence, it is impossible to evaluate the degree to which perceived political relevance may have played a role in the immediate acclaim of individual Athenian poets and their dramas beyond their native city. But the varied political approaches of the three extant tragedians and the differences in their reception—Euripides was by far the most frequently reflected in art and performed onstage—seem to suggest that politics and popularity may not have gone hand-in-hand, at least not beyond the initial competition at which a play was premiered.¹⁵² By the fourth

¹⁴⁹ E.g. Taplin (2007) esp. 4–13; see also Kowalzig (2008) 130–131, with additional references; Allan (2001); Green (1994) esp. 49–104 *passim*; Easterling (1994); Taplin (1993) 12–30, 79–88 on tragedy and ‘paratragedy’ in vase paintings, with additional material on the iconographic reception of comedy outside of Athens.

¹⁵⁰ Taplin (2007) esp. 88–89 on the limited evidence and 90–107 on ‘some vases that may be related to Sophocles’ (the chapter title). Taplin’s analysis is explicitly more cautious than those of some of his predecessors (see Carpenter 2008, and cf. the references in Green 1994, esp. 20–22), but even the most optimistic census would still place Sophocles well behind Aeschylus and Euripides.

¹⁵¹ Taplin (2007) 48, 88, 108–109, with references, pointing out (p. 88) that ‘we have no stories of [Sophocles’] journeying elsewhere to put on his plays, and no evidence that his plays were known in his lifetime outside Athens and Attica’.

¹⁵² It has been suggested that patriotism and pro-Athenian sentiment—or lack thereof—may have in certain cases affected the outcomes of the fifth-century dramatic contests, particularly in the case of Euripides: see e.g. Walton (1980) 23–29, esp. 25; Pickard-Cambridge

century, other artistic features of a given drama may have been more important criteria for its success.¹⁵³ Demosthenes, speaking in the year 343 BC, said that Sophocles' *Antigone*, for example, was repeated at Athens 'many times' (Dem. 19.246) during the earlier fourth century.¹⁵⁴ But this play would have had less political significance in an Athens where both public burial and displays of individual authority had become less contentious issues.¹⁵⁵

The broader political interests treated in the second and third sections of this chapter probably say much more about the position of fifth-century Athens within the wider Greek world than they do about any explicit desire on Sophocles' part to reach audiences beyond Attica. Sophocles was himself a 'polis-dwelling Greek',¹⁵⁶ and Athens, as distinctive as many of its experiences were, was still emphatically a Greek *polis*. While Sophoclean tragedy may or may not explicitly intend to *tell* us that, it nevertheless *shows* it.

(1968²) 95–99; Lefkowitz (1981) 94–96, 101–102; Goette (2007) esp. 148, citing also (n76) Wilson (2000) esp. 172–197.

¹⁵³ See Hall (1996), who reads Aristotle's *Poetics* as deliberately treating those aspects of tragedy that are *not* embedded in Athenian democratic politics. Taplin (2007) 89 also points to Aristotle as a way of accessing the fourth-century estimation of Sophocles.

¹⁵⁴ A competition was initiated at the City Dionysia in 386 BC for the revival of an older tragedy (see Snell 1986, 11 = *TrGF* I DID A 1 201–203). On subsequent re-performances of Sophocles at Athens, Snell (1986) 17–21 lists *Telepheia* 'ca. 380', *Antigone* 'ca. a. 365' (citing both Dem. 19.246 and a less direct reference at Dem. 18.180), and *Oinomaos* 'ca. a. 365'. A possible *Epigonoi* in 'ca. 380/40' is listed at an unknown location. Although this list seems remarkably short, the fragmentary nature of all evidence for theatrical performance should be noted: see e.g. Csapo/Slater (1995); Green (1994).

¹⁵⁵ See Ferrario (2006).

¹⁵⁶ See note 11, above.

SOPHOCLES AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

Kurt A. Raaflaub

Sophocles was born in 497/6 and died in 406 BC. He was too young to fight at Salamis or Plataea but witnessed these battles and subsequently the entire range of successes and failures of Athenian policies, the rise and decline of the Athenian empire, the age of Pericles, and the long and bitter Peloponnesian War almost to the end. Unlike Aeschylus and Euripides, he held several public offices, not least that of *stratêgos* during the Samian War and perhaps once or twice more, and that of *proboulos*, charged with resolving the crisis after the Sicilian disaster. He performed his first play in 470 and won his first victory in 468. In the first phase of his long career as a tragic poet he thus witnessed Aeschylus at the height of his art, in the last phase he competed with Euripides.¹ It is important to keep this biographical data in mind when considering the issue of political thought in Sophocles' plays.

1. *The Political Dimension of Greek Tragedy*

The larger question of the extent to which Greek tragedies are 'political' or contain expressions of political thought has been much debated.² Certainly, such expressions need not be found in every play; tragedies are highly sophisticated works of art, and art usually is multilayered; the political layer is only one among several, and not always the most important. On the other hand, strong arguments are available to support the possibility of a political interpretation of at least some plays. Early Greek poets were not simply entertainers but seen as voices of communal conscience and responsibility.³

¹ See the testimonia in *TrGF* IV and Tyrrell, this volume.

² For a detailed argument, see Meier (1993); Seaford (1994a). Saïd (1998); Boedeker/Raaflaub (2005) offer summaries, discussion, and references. Most of the contributors in Winkler/Zeitlin (1990); Sommerstein et al. (1993); Pelling (1997b) work from that assumption. Doubts and questions, e.g., in Griffin (1998), (1999a); Kurke (1998); Rhodes (2003). Ferrario, this volume, is to be compared throughout.

³ Herington (1985) 67–71; Thomas (1995); earlier bibliography: Raaflaub (1991) 249–250 with n144.

A strong strand of political thought runs through Homer's epics and some of the extant lyric and elegiac poetry. The tragic poets, as well as the early historians, inherited this political and didactic function.⁴

In *Frogs*, performed in 405, just before the disastrous end of the Peloponnesian War, Aristophanes explicitly recognizes this function. In the contest for the poet's chair in the underworld Sophocles, still alive when the play was written but dead when it was performed, could not be considered—although Aeschylus asks him to take care of his chair during his absence (1515–1519).⁵ In this contest, Aeschylus eventually asks the crucial question: 'For what should a poet be admired?' Euripides responds: 'For skill and good advice, and because we make men better in their cities' (1008–1010). In the ensuing debate Aeschylus prevails because in his plays he has focused on presenting models of martial valour, patriotism, self-sacrifice, civic unity, and discipline—qualities the Athenians at the time needed more than ever. In the end, the discussion emphasizes communal concerns even more directly. Dionysus wants to bring a poet back to the upper world 'so that the city may survive and keep presenting its choral festivals. So whichever of you is going to give the city some good advice, that's the one I think I will bring back' (1418–1421). He finally chooses Aeschylus to bestow blessings upon his fellow citizens and save the city with his good counsels (1487, 1500–1503).

Demosthenes too praises 'the wise Sophocles' for the 'fine and useful' speech he wrote for Creon in *Antigone*, and Aristotle, contradicting Plato, claims that tragedy indeed has the capacity of improving the citizens.⁶ Still, the question is whether such capacity for giving 'good counsels'—the didactic function of tragedy—involves more than providing those models for moral and civic behaviour that Aeschylus suggests in *Frogs*.⁷

In the period between the Persian and the end of the Peloponnesian War, the entire citizen community of Athens was profoundly transformed and highly politicized; the experience of democracy, unprecedented, exhilarating, and in many ways contested, and that of the rapid changes brought about by Athens' rise to power, frequent involvement in war, and intellectual revolution caused massive challenges and tensions that needed to be worked out. The enormous cultural upswing in this period is directly

⁴ See Rowe/Schofield (2000) chs. 2–4; for the historians also Raaflaub (2010) with further bibliography.

⁵ For discussion: Dover (1993) 10–37. Sophocles: Sommerstein (1996a) 20–21.

⁶ Salkever (1986). Dem. 19.246–248 on *Ant.* 175–190. See Hose (1995) 185–186 with more references.

⁷ See below at n11.

connected with these experiences, and every genre of literature and the arts reflects the communal effort to cope with these challenges. It is *a priori* likely that in all this the theatre had an important role to play.⁸

Furthermore, in some tragedies of both Aeschylus (as well as *Persians*, especially *Suppliants* and *Oresteia*, and most of all *Eumenides*) and Euripides (for instance, *Suppliants*, *Heraclidae*, *Trojan Women*, *Phoenissae*), political content relevant to contemporary experiences and problems cannot be overlooked.⁹ Sophocles thus must have been immersed as well in what we might call 'the political culture of tragedy'. Since he experienced the power of Aeschylean tragedy and, according to his self-characterization (Plut. *Mor.* 79B = T100) was at first strongly influenced by his predecessor, and since he himself was politically active, it would be surprising if he had not adopted the poets' traditional communal, didactic, and political function.

How do we define this function? It is easier to say what it is not: unlike comedy, tragedy is not directly and openly political, commenting on problems, taking sides on politically divisive issues, and offering advice on what to do. The 'interprétation historique', popular fifty years ago, has been discredited.¹⁰ Comedy engages in personal attacks and satirizes well-known public figures—Socrates in *Clouds*, Cleon in *Knights* and *Wasps*—while, as we shall see, efforts to identify tragic characters with Athenian public figures have not been successful. While each comedy created its own story, in most tragedies the subject matter was taken from a small number of well-known myths. Myth was malleable, allowing the poets to elaborate and reinterpret the stories in order to emphasize specific aspects and convey specific meaning. Like Aeschylus in *Frogs*, many Athenians would probably have emphasized the presentation of moral and civic models, and indeed in some of Euripides' plays—such as *Suppliants* with a catalogue of civic virtues in Adrastus' funeral oration, or *Heraclidae* and *Phoenissae* where young women and men sacrifice themselves for the common good—it is hard not to recognize the poet's focus on the communal reliance on such virtues.¹¹ But this does not apply generally—in fact, in Sophocles it would

⁸ Culture, empire, and democracy: Boedeker/Raaflaub (1998); social transformation: Raaflaub (1998); tragedy, culture, and social challenges: Meier (1991), (1993), (1999).

⁹ Aeschylus: Meier (1993) ch. 5; both poets: Raaflaub (1988) 281–296, 342–350; Euripides: Gregory (1991); Hose (1995).

¹⁰ See, e.g., Delebecque (1951); Goossens (1962); some of this also in Podlecki (1966a).

¹¹ Dover (1993) 14–16; Raaflaub (2001) 99–117 on models; for discussion of the 'didactic theory', Croally (1994) ch. 1; Heath (1987) 38–47, (1999) esp. 137–142; on self-sacrifice: Mendelsohn (2002); Konstan (2007).

be hard to find unambiguously positive or negative models—and it certainly does not encapsulate the much more subtle and challenging nature of tragedy's political function.

It might be best to illustrate with a few examples what is essential here. I begin with one from Homer's *Iliad*. Agamemnon, paramount leader of the Achaeans, knows that his duty is to make sure that his 'people be safe, not perish' (1.117; 2.233–334). One of the political threads running through the *Iliad* concerns precisely this aspect. In his quarrel with Achilles—announced in the proem as the epic's main theme (1.1–7)—Agamemnon makes disastrous mistakes that jeopardize his army's success and his own position. But then he recognizes his error, listens to his peers' advice, and makes great efforts to achieve reconciliation. Henceforth he does everything right and in the end proves an exemplary leader who is praised for having reached a higher level of justice: 'in the future, you will be more just (*dikaioteros*) in the eyes of every other man' (19.181).¹² Every leader makes mistakes; the community rewards the one who is able to overcome them and re-establish unity as a condition for communal success. By contrast, on the Trojan side Hector, in many ways a perfect leader on whom the community depends for its survival (6.402–403, 441–446), compounds an initial error that causes a grave military setback by proving unable to admit it, swallow his pride, and put all his efforts into restoring the damage; he sets his personal honour above communal well-being and in the end causes, through his own death, that of his *polis* (18.243–313; 22.99–110). Here the poet does not present clear-cut models to imitate; rather, he questions and undercuts simple assessments. The reality—and the lessons to be learned—are more complex. The dramatic narrative enables the public to observe the qualities and behaviours associated with good and bad leadership, the consequences of both, and the possibility of one turning into the other.¹³

In *Suppliants*, Aeschylus strongly emphasizes democratic procedures and the participation of all citizens (*pasa polis*) in decision-making. One might be tempted to see here an endorsement of democracy, especially since the play was performed in 463, shortly before the reforms attributed to Ephialtes. Yet Aeschylus does not say so; his purpose, if we consider the context, may rather be to make his audience think about why decision-making

¹² The interpretation of this line is debated: I follow Ameis/Hentze (1906) ad loc. ('im Urteil jedes anderen').

¹³ Raaflaub (2001) 80–83, (2009) 567–568.

by *pasa polis* makes sense. If either choice, the leader says, is likely to have serious consequences that could harm the entire community—divine punishment if the suppliants are rejected, war if they are accepted—he cannot decide by himself. Rather, he must allow the men who will be affected to discuss and decide the case in full assembly. And so it happens: the assembly decides unanimously to shelter the suppliants, the army marches out to war and, with the gods' help, wins a glorious victory. When this play was performed, Athens was almost constantly involved in wars fought mostly by the fleet that was rowed largely by the lower-class citizens. This citizen class had only recently risen to military prominence and was perhaps not yet fully recognized politically. The play thus raises questions that are significant for the consideration of contemporary political issues.¹⁴

The reform of 462/1, it turned out, was perceived by many Athenians as the partisan victory of one part of the citizen body over the other. Violence ensued, *stasis* threatened, and fear of treason by a 'fifth column' pervaded the city. In the aftermath of these events, Aeschylus wrote the *Oresteia*. In *Eumenides* he dramatizes a conflict between an ancient group of deities, the Furies, endowed with primordial rights and duties, and a group of young gods who have recently assumed power, and who, by their actions (cleansing Orestes, the matricide, and allowing him to be acquitted in a law court) do not recognize the Furies' rights (to avenge matricide). The Furies in turn refuse to accept the court's verdict and threaten to direct their revenge against the court's city, Athens. The compromise, reached by Athena's patient persuasion, offers the Furies an honoured place and function in the new civic and divine order. As Christian Meier suggests, this strand of the tragic discourse, woven into a more complex drama, receives deep meaning from the political context of contemporary Athens. Its new order, we understand, can achieve stability and permanence only if it succeeds in integrating the old order in ways that give it a meaningful and honourable function.¹⁵

The poets, we see, do not convey direct and explicit lessons but illuminate important issues indirectly, through dramatic action and dialogue. They do not tell their public what they must do but encourage them to think and consider aspects they may not have thought about. Many in the audience probably did not 'get it' or were absorbed by other aspects of the drama. Those who did were made more critically aware and enabled to cope better

¹⁴ Raaflaub (1988) 286–288; Meier (1993) 84–97.

¹⁵ Meier (1990) 82–139; cf. (1993) 102–137.

with problems that were troubling the community. Occasional allusions to contemporary events—such as, in *Eumenides*, the alliance with Argos promised by Orestes, Athena's appropriation of Troy, and the prominence of the Areopagus (recently disempowered by Ephialtes' reforms)—could serve as 'pointers', alerting the audience to the play's significance for their present time.

This understanding of the political dimension of Greek tragedy or, more cautiously, of political thought woven into and expressed through tragedy, seems to me plausible even if no ancient critic confirms it explicitly.¹⁶ The intellectual activity concerned here was not called 'political thought' but 'philosophy', and tragedians were often associated with philosophers. We shall now examine four of Sophocles' plays, trying to tease out their political aspects.¹⁷

2. *Ajax*

The *Ajax* cannot be dated precisely but is generally considered an early play, often assigned to the 450s. It has recently, like *Philoctetes*, experienced a revival from an unexpected perspective: performed to or read by American war veterans as a therapeutic aid to cope with post-traumatic stress disorder, the focus here rests on the wounded psyche of a warrior exposed to long, intense, and brutal fighting.¹⁸ It is also a play in which Sophocles brings various types of human behaviour into mutual confrontation; it deals with atonement for *hubris* (although this aspect has often been overstressed); and 'it is the tragedy of the great man, whose excessive strength draws down lightning on his head and feels the full force of its deadly fires'.¹⁹

The play has rarely been interpreted from a political perspective.²⁰ Yet it is hard to overlook a political dimension especially in the second part, with its debates about the burial of Ajax' body. The attitudes displayed here, as well as earlier by Ajax himself, represent various ethical but also political positions on power, self, and responsibility to others, not least the

¹⁶ See the objections of Heath (1999) to Croally's (1994) thesis that tragedy's didactic function focuses on questioning ideology.

¹⁷ All transl. from H. Lloyd-Jones' Loeb edition, often slightly modified.

¹⁸ E.g., Meineck (2009); see also Shay (1994); Tritle (1997) on similar interpretations of aspects of the *Iliad*.

¹⁹ Lesky (1966) 279. See Finglass, this volume.

²⁰ An exception is Meier (1993) 167–187; see also Knox (1979) 125–160; Burnett (1998) 65–98.

community. Despite all his nobility and strength, Ajax' thinking is limited to the parameters set by friendship and enmity, pride and humiliation; he is entirely self-reliant, rejects everyone's (even the gods') help (760–777), and in deciding on suicide as the only way to save his honour, ignores his responsibility toward those close to him and to the army that depends on him to win the war (although this aspect is barely mentioned in the play [962–963]), and thus the community of which he is a leader. In this Ajax resembles the heroes of the *Iliad*, Achilles and Hector. The appearance of this character type is surely significant here.

The debates between Teucer and Menelaus, as well as Agamemnon, anticipate traits of the conflict between Creon and Antigone in *Antigone*, not least in the way that arguments and opinions are taken to an extreme and any concession is ruled out. Teucer defends the principles of respecting the dead and helping one's family and friends, and thus stresses conventional norms, here explicitly called 'laws of the gods' (1343). The Atridae insist on their power, the absolute validity of their decree (prohibiting Ajax' burial), and the need to enforce their authority and the obedience of their people; they behave like tyrants (and admit it: 1350) and painfully reveal the weakness behind their tough words:

Indeed it is the mark of a villain for a common man (*andra dêmotên*) to refuse to obey those in authority. The laws of a city can never function well where no one is afraid, nor can an army be sensibly controlled, when it has not the protection of fear and respect ... Know that when a man feels fear and shame, then he is safe! But where he can be insolent and do as he pleases, believe that that city, though at first it has sailed along easily, will in time sink to the bottom! Let some terror be established where it is needed, and let us not suppose that if we act according to our pleasure we shall not in time pay for our actions with our pain. (1071–1086)

Allusions to concepts well known from contemporaneous debates about democracy (here, for instance, the need to obey the laws and those in authority, or the ability to do as one likes) suggest the context in which such statements must have resonated. Not surprisingly, it takes a radically different stance, represented by Odysseus, to resolve the stalemate in which the principled verbal fights between Teucer and his opponents end.

Initially Ajax' worst enemy, Odysseus refuses to rejoice in his humiliation (121–133) and to engage in revenge beyond his death (1318–1401). He recognizes the dead hero's great merits and the universal laws of humanity, the vicissitudes of human fate, the weakness of the individual and the fragility of human life and aspirations, the hollowness of the claims of the powerful,

and the need to avoid *hubris* and the gods' ire. His discussion with Agamemnon puts the crucial issues in focus:

- AG. Odysseus, are you fighting for this man against me?
 OD. Yes, I hated him when it was honourable to hate him.
 AG. Now that he is dead, should you not trample on him?
 OD. Son of Atreus, do not take pleasure in a superiority that is ignoble!
 AG. It is not easy for a ruler (*tyrannos*) to be pious.
 OD. But he should honour his friends when they give good advice.
 AG. The noble man should obey those in authority ... Have you such respect for the corpse of an enemy?
 OD. His excellence weighs more with me than his enmity.
 AG. That is what inconsistent men are like ...
 OD. It is not my way to approve of a rigid mind.
 AG. On this day you will make us seem cowards.
 OD. No, men who are just in the sight of all the Greeks. (1346–1363)

Statements such as these and earlier ones by the Atridae (1071–1086 [above], 1226–1263) raise questions that were relevant to contemporaries coping with the impact of democracy. We know some of them from Thucydidean speeches: how far does the authority of those entrusted with office reach? What qualities should determine their relations with their subjects? How can the people best be induced to follow their leaders? How can respect for the laws and those placed in office be compatible with the individual's liberty? How can self-interest be reconciled with communal interest? Is rigid adherence to decisions better than flexibility informed by justice and humanity? Do compassion and the ability to compromise reveal strength or weakness?²¹

In extant tragedy (especially that of Euripides), Odysseus often appears as the embodiment of the clever, unscrupulous, self-centred demagogue who flatters the masses to achieve his ends. Whatever the expectations with which the audience greeted him in this play, they must have noticed that here he is a wise statesman, a 'reconciler', a man capable of showing respect to his superior even in disagreement, and limiting this disagreement to the matter at hand. In this, Christian Meier emphasizes, he displays new qualities needed in a community based on equal participation by all, and shows ways to overcome an old aristocratic value system that is based on stark contrasts, rigid claims to honour upheld at all costs, and preference

²¹ See, e.g., 2.37; 3.37. For debates about democracy (without considering *Ajax*), see Raaf-laub (1989).

for personal over communal considerations.²² The Chorus comments early on the need for collaboration between high and low:

When someone shoots at noble spirits, he will never miss, though if he were to say such things against me he would not win credence: for it is against him who has that envy marches. Yet small men without the aid of great men are unsafe guardians of a wall; for little men are best supported by the great and the great by smaller men. (154–163)

Read in this way, *Ajax* dramatizes important problems of Athenian democracy and relations among the citizens. Finally, in various parts of the play (e.g., 1097–1113, 1232–1234) the terminology reminds us of that which is applied to the relationship between Athens as the *hêgemôn* and the allies turned into subjects in its *archê*, and to the tension between allied subordination and autonomy. It is thus likely that the poet was also alluding to, and intending the audience to think about, this troubled and contested relationship.²³ Both issues are likely to have agitated the Athenian community increasingly in the 450s.

3. *Antigone*

This complex play was performed in the late 440s.²⁴ It is centred around the conflict between two powerful personalities. Creon, the new king who has risen to power after the demise of Oedipus and his sons, decrees an honourable burial for Eteocles (the defender of the city) and prohibits that of Polyneices (the attacker). Antigone's sense of obligation towards her family forces her to ignore Creon's decree. This conflict was long understood as the result of extreme interpretations of the equally justified demands of *polis* and family. Such tension was at least partly the result of democracy's civic ideology and its encroachment into spheres previously reserved exclusively for the family—most clearly visible in the state funeral (*patrios nomos*) for the war dead that was introduced soon after the Persian Wars.²⁵ Although

²² Meier (n20). The evidence for Odysseus as a demagogue is collected in Nestle (1901) 289–291.

²³ So too Meier (1993) 185–186. On changes in terminology: Raaflaub (2004) ch. 4.

²⁴ For details and discussion, see Carter, this volume.

²⁵ Thuc. 2.34; see Clairmont (1983); Loraux (1986) 15–42. Democratic civic ideology: e.g., Pericles in Thuc. 2.43 with Aristophanes' reaction in *Lysistrata*; on the citizen as a 'lover' of the *polis* or *demos*, see Connor (1971) ch. 3; Monoson (1994); Azoulay (2010) 115–123; on the citizen's 'political identity', Meier (1990) ch. 6.

this view has been challenged, the play's introduction leaves no doubt that Creon and Antigone indeed represent two contrasting principles: personal obligations toward family and friends correspond to primordial unwritten laws protected by the gods, while the citizen's political obligation to the community expresses itself through respect for communal laws (which in this case means obedience to the ruler's decree); the woman's orientation toward the inside, the *oikos*, clashes with the men's focus on *polis* and the violent world outside (esp. 59 ff.).²⁶ Both principles are correct in essential ways, both are crucial for human society, but both are detrimental when they are taken for absolute. This is precisely what both antagonists do, and since they both stubbornly insist on their positions, their conflict inevitably results in disaster.

In an impressive choral ode that has been characterized as the most grandiose expression of the 'consciousness of ability' that emerged in fifth-century Athens, Sophocles suggests his solution:²⁷ 'Many things are formidable, and none more formidable than man!'. He has subjected to his will and planning earth, nature, and living beings;

he has learned speech, wind-swift thought, and the disposition to live together in cities ... All-resourceful, he approaches nothing that will face him without resource; only from death will he find no means of flight but he has contrived escape from desperate illnesses. Skilful beyond hope is the contrivance of his art, and he advances sometimes to evil, at other times to good. When he applies the laws of the earth and the justice the gods have sworn to uphold he is high in the city (*hypsipolis*); outcast from the city (*apolis*) is he with whom the ignoble consorts because of his recklessness. (332–371)

Both the laws of the city *and* the laws of the gods, human enacted law *and* divine, unwritten, conventional norms must be obeyed; one must not be taken for absolute at the expense of the other; hence the city's laws must not violate those norms protected by the gods precisely because they are generally valid and based on age-old tradition.²⁸ Creon's fall thus results from his insistence on the law of the *polis*, far beyond what is necessary to the community's interest.

Moreover, Sophocles here problematizes the relations between ruler and subjects and addresses the question of how far the citizens' duty to obey the authorities extends—that is, under what conditions individuals in the *polis*

²⁶ Said (1998) 285–295 discusses tragic tensions between *oikos* and *polis*.

²⁷ Meier (1990) 199; 'consciousness of ability': Meier (1990) ch. 8.

²⁸ On 'unwritten or divine laws', see Ostwald (1973); Wallace (2007).

are justified in insisting on their autonomy. Antigone, her sister Ismene, her fiancé (and Creon's son) Haemon, and the Chorus, all challenged by the king's decree, answer this question in various ways, defining possibilities of political action. Again myth is adapted to make the audience aware of crucial communal and political issues; by illuminating conditions and consequences of 'typical' reactions to such problems, tragedy enhances their ability to master such challenges.

Problems posed by the relationship between ruler and subjects are intensified in this case because Creon gradually changes his attitude and behaviour. Praised as the city's saviour, he has risen to power with the citizens' consent. Initially he appears as a good-willed and caring, if perhaps not very judicious or far-sighted leader. As the play progresses, however, the poet carefully shows him assuming more and more of the typical traits of a tyrant. Victor Ehrenberg has tried to demonstrate that in all this the poet alludes to the 'rule' of Pericles who at that time, after the ostracism of his long-standing rival, Thucydides son of Melesias, had reached the peak of his power. In the political polemics of the 440s, both opponents and comic poets accused Pericles of tyrannical aspirations. Even more objective observers might have been wondering whether Pericles would be able in the long run to resist the temptation of consolidating and abusing his power for personal purposes. We cannot exclude the idea, therefore, that many spectators interpreted the figure of Creon in this way.²⁹

Yet the complex of problems addressed here had significance beyond Athens. Like Aeschylus, Sophocles also seems to have addressed the relations between Athens and its subject cities in the *archê*.³⁰ For example, Creon's development from generally accepted leader to tyrant is analogous to that of Athens from *hêgemôn* in the Delian League to *polis tyrannos*—an analogy that is underscored by the use of terminology prompting associations with Athens' role in the league. With Creon as with Athens, it is less imprudence than intransigence and suppression of dissent that turns the leader into a tyrant. The conflict between divine law and civic law thus becomes explosive only when a tyrant takes his decrees for absolute and considers their full realization a matter of power and prestige. It seems justified to think here of the conflict, attested by other authors, between the

²⁹ Ehrenberg (1954); see also Giorgini (1993) 194–200; on Pericles' 'rule as the first man': Thuc. 2.65; on criticism of Pericles' power: Ehrenberg, 84–91; Schubert (1994) 5–9; Podlecki (1998) 169–176; Azoulay (2010) 237–247 (all with sources).

³⁰ Aeschylus: Rosenbloom (1996); Raaflaub (1988) 284–286, 295–296.

superior 'panhellenic' *nomoi* invoked to protect the freedom and autonomy of all Greek *poleis*, and the demands and decrees of the ruling *polis* which insist on the uncompromising adherence to existing treaties.³¹

It is at any rate significant that the first choral ode (esp. 127–137) emphasizes the retaliation which will befall proud arrogance, and the third the power of Zeus, which cannot be kept down by any mortal but rules without sleep, time, or aging.

For present, future and past this law shall suffice: to none among mortals shall great wealth come without disaster. For widely wandering hope brings profit to many men, but to many the deception of thoughtless longings; and a man knows nothing when it comes upon him, until he scalds his foot in blazing fire. For in wisdom someone has revealed the famous saying, that evil seems good to him whose mind the god is driving towards disaster; but the small man fares throughout his time without disaster. (604–625)

The theme recurs in the Chorus' final statement:

Good sense is by far the chief part of happiness, and we must not be impious towards the gods. The great words of boasters are always punished with great blows, and as they grow old teach them wisdom. (1347–1353)

We are reminded here both of the collective character portrait which Thucydides lets the Corinthians draw of the Athenians, and of some statements he attributes to Pericles about the unrivalled power and glory of Athens.³²

One of the play's main themes, then, is the divine punishment of human overbearing and the tyrant's absolute demand for obedience. Scholars have seen here too an allusion to Pericles. Yet he carefully tried to avoid any semblance of immoderate claims to power and ostentation—which Sophocles must have known well enough—and the play's concern is far too serious to permit us to think here merely of one more voice in the chorus of Pericles' critics who were driven by polemics, rivalry, and comic exaggeration. It thus seems better to explain the emphasis the poet places on these specific issues by his intention—especially urgent in the time of the Samian War—to address the problems raised by Athens' role as oppressive ruler in its *archê*.³³ For confirmation of this interpretation we turn to *Oedipus*.

³¹ 'Panhellenic', divine etc. *nomoi*: above n28. On changes in the relations between Athens and its allies and in the corresponding terminology: Raaflaub (2004) ch. 4.

³² Thuc. 1.70; 2.41, 61, 63–64, and see n35 below.

³³ For other views on political aspects in *Antigone*, see, e.g., Labellarte (1977); Meier (1993) 187–203; Foley (1996).

4. *Oedipus Tyrannus*

The date of this play is uncertain. Although, in view of their obvious differences, a connection between the plague that destroys Oedipus' Thebes and the famous Athenian plague of the early 420s is not necessary, and although recent scholarship proposes the mid- to late 430s, it is still tempting to place the play soon after 429.³⁴ Even more than *Antigone*, this is the tragedy of a ruler who as the city's saviour has become its king and, despite his best intentions, is destroyed not least by his own stubbornness and lack of insight. It is also a play about human power and helplessness, and about the dangers and limitations of knowledge and the desire to know. It owes its fame to this human and universal dimension.

From a political perspective, it is again the characterization of the king that fascinates. Right at the beginning, the Chorus appeals to him:

Come, best of living men, raise up the city! Come, take care! For now this land calls you its preserver on account of the zeal you showed before; and let it not be our memory of your reign that we were stood up straight at first only to fall later; no, raise up the city so that it does not fall! (46–51)

And indeed, to save the city is Oedipus' goal (68–72) to which he subordinates all other considerations. This man, although full of good intentions, is called several times and emphatically a tyrant, and in the course of the play he develops many of the typological characteristics of a tyrant—even if less radically than Creon. Carefully analyzing the play's terminology and imagery, Victor Ehrenberg found here too an effort to confront the phenomenon of the long 'rule of the first man', Pericles. That the Athenian audience thought of this association—though surely not exclusively—is likely, especially if the play was performed not long after their leader's death. But particularly the choral ode in the middle of the play raises doubts; it describes the rise, overbearing, and fall of the tyrant for which the Chorus prays to Zeus:

Hybris brings forth the tyrant. Hybris, if vainly satiated with profusion that is not right or fitting, mounts to the topmost cornice and rushes to the edge of an abyss where its feet can do it no service. But I pray the god may never undo the wrestler's throw that brought good to the city; never shall I cease to hold the god for my protector. But if a man moves arrogantly in deed or word, without fear of justice, and without reverence for the seats of the gods, may an evil

³⁴ 430s: Müller (1984); response to the Athenian plague: Knox (1979) 112–124; Segal (1993) 9–11. See also Beer, this volume. Plague: *OT* 22–30 vs. *Thuc.* 2.47–54.

fate take him, for his ill-starred pride, if he will not win his advantage justly and keep himself from acts irreverent, or if he wantonly lays hands on things inviolate! ... For if such actions are to win respect, why should we honour the gods with dances? ... But o ruler, if you are rightly thus called, Zeus, lord of all, may this not escape you and your ever deathless power! (873–905)

It causes great difficulties to think of Oedipus as the target of these reflections. But they fit perfectly, as Bernard Knox has proposed, if numerous allusions enabled the audience to recognize in the character traits of Oedipus, even in those relating to the typology of tyranny, an embodiment of the collective character of the Athenians which Thucydides uses as a leitmotif in explaining the successes and failures of his own city. And indeed, one trait and reaction of Oedipus after another mirrors those positive and negative characteristics of the Athenian people, centred on 'aggressive activism' (*polypragmosynê*).³⁵

Oedipus the tyrant is therefore more than an individual tragic figure. In title, nature, and foundation of his power, and in his character and behaviour, he resembles Athens the 'tyrant city'. In Thucydides, not only do Athens' enemies use this metaphor, but even its leaders to urge the Athenians to persist in their quest for power and glory.³⁶ The way Oedipus is described and acts is likely therefore to have prompted the audience to identify especially closely with the experiences and suffering of this tragic hero. That in the end he tumbles from the greatest power into the greatest misery and loses everything he has achieved precisely because of his extraordinary qualities must have been perceived as a warning, foreshadowing the possibility, or even inevitability, of the fall of the *polis tyrannos*.

In this play too, therefore, a citizen and thinker, deeply aware of traditional values and of his responsibility as a voice of public conscience, focuses on fundamental issues concerning his community. Here too myth becomes a medium for dissecting and illuminating essential political issues, and inducing the citizens to become aware of them and confront them. The mythical action receives its full meaning only because it helps interpret the audience's—not least political—present. As Charles Segal suggests, it

is even possible that Oedipus' search for who he really is reflects something of a communal identity crisis in a city that had undergone a massive transformation in a short time and had refashioned itself from a rather quiet, traditional

³⁵ Ehrenberg (1954); Knox (1957) 53–106, (1979) 87–95; see also Giorgini (1993) 200–209. Athenian character portrait: Thuc. 1.70; cf., e.g., 6.9.3, 18.3; Eur. *Supp.* 476–510, 576–577, 728–730, 736–744; Raaflaub (1989) 51–52, (1994); Grethlein (2005).

³⁶ Thuc. 1.122.3, 1.124.3, 2.63.2, 3.37.2; see Connor (1977); Raaflaub (2003).

aristocracy ... in the sixth century into a radical, intellectualized democracy and a powerful empire ... Like every great work of art, however, the play transcends its immediate historical context. It is one of the great meditations on the mystery of our place in a world that, despite our enormous power and intelligence, we can only partially control and understand.³⁷

5. *Philoctetes*

Philoctetes is firmly dated to 409, soon after the oligarchy of the 400 and the more moderate regime of the 5,000 had been overthrown and democracy restored. It was a turbulent period. Only four years earlier the aged poet had been called upon to help put his community, shaken to the core by the Sicilian disaster, back on an even keel. Apparently, he had initially supported the takeover of the 400, but turned against them when their deceit became fully visible. Even after the restoration of democracy, however, deep rifts divided the city. We might expect the poet to convey something to his fellow-citizens that was significant in their current situation. Again, we look not for direct connections, one-to-one identifications, but for constellations, relationships, conflicts, patterns of behaviour, and values upon which the drama focuses and that may have resonated with the audience at the time.³⁸

Aeschylus and Euripides had written *Philoctetes*-plays around 475 and in 431 respectively. We know enough about these to recognize Sophocles' main innovations—that *Philoctetes* is marooned on a completely uninhabited island, which massively increases his misery and justified anger against the Achaeans, and that Achilles' son Neoptolemus is sent with Odysseus to return to Troy the hero and his famed bow which, according to a prophecy, will be necessary to win the war.³⁹ Neoptolemus is a young man, aspiring to emulate his idealized father and still untainted by the corruption and moral compromises typical of seasoned political leaders. Tensions between three

³⁷ Segal (1993) 11.

³⁸ On the historical context, see, e.g., Ostwald (1986) ch. 7; Munn (2000) chs. 5–6. On Sophocles' involvement: Jameson (1956), (1971). On the poets' responses to the Athenian crisis in the late fifth century: Hose (1995), who convincingly argues against Jameson's effort (1956) to identify Neoptolemus with the younger Pericles (see also Mandel 1981, 115n20), and against Calder's attempt (1971) to interpret *Philoctetes* as Sophocles' apologia for having aided in the establishment of a tyrannical oligarchy. See also Jameson (1956) 219 against earlier tendencies to identify *Philoctetes* with Alcibiades.

³⁹ For reconstruction of the earlier plays and discussion, see Mandel (1981); see also Jameson (1956); Hose (1995) 95–112; Heath (1999); Kyriakou, this volume.

personal, moral, and political stances feed the play's dynamic. Odysseus, morally indifferent and pragmatic, has only one goal, to accomplish his mission by whatever means necessary. Neoptolemus is torn by moral dilemmas: the need to follow the commanders' orders, his own ambition to succeed and gain glory, his inclination to abhor dishonesty, and the pity he feels for the miserable outcast. Philoctetes is filled by irreconcilable hatred against those who caused his misery, stubbornly refuses to collaborate, and only wishes to be brought home.

Aeschylus had used the (disguised) Odysseus' rhetorical powers and cunning to compel Philoctetes to yield to necessity in the interest of a higher (communal) good. At the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, Euripides had staged a big debate between the Achaeans sent to fetch Philoctetes and a Trojan delegation led by Paris that competed for Philoctetes' support; patriotic arguments and brute force secured the Achaean victory. Neither is visible in Sophocles' play: Neoptolemus, initially willing to use treachery, refuses to apply force and then abandons deceit; when Philoctetes refuses to yield to honesty and patriotic appeals as well, Neoptolemus even decides to sacrifice his own ambition and betray the Achaean war effort in order to keep his promise and bring Philoctetes home. Only Heracles, Philoctetes' former companion and first owner of his bow, appearing as *deus ex machina*, is able to convince him to change his mind and return to Troy—not least by emphasizing the prospect of being healed and gaining immortal glory.

Superficially, it seems easy to relate these conflicts to the political and intellectual conditions of the time. The notorious *physis-nomos* debate pervaded intellectual discourse and literature. Moral indifference and utilitarian principles marked the thinking of some sophists and politicians, and a prominent sophist, Antiphon, was 'chief ideologue' of the oligarchic coup of 411. The oligarchs assumed power and ruled with treachery and violence. Their overthrow and the restoration of democracy resulted in harsh prosecutions of the guilty and the death and exile of many who had been actively involved or merely gone along; even years later, the fallout of these policies prompted Aristophanes, in the *parabasis* of *Frogs*, to call for an amnesty and the reintegration of the excluded in the interest of communal survival and success. Irreconcilable hatred and the pursuit of selfish goals even to the extent of treason, rigid adherence to principles and the ruthless persecution of enemies dominated the thinking of many on both sides of the democratic-oligarchic divide.⁴⁰ Even if efforts to establish exact

⁴⁰ Debate about *physis* and *nomos*: Heinimann (1945); Guthrie (1971) ch. 4. Utilitarianism:

correspondences between the play and contemporary politics are likely to remain futile, this should not prevent us from recognizing the poet's intention to dramatize conflicts between a variety of competing 'typical' attitudes and personalities. This is not just 'Philoctetes' play, a study in suffering'—crucial though this aspect is for the peculiar appeal of this figure. Nor is it merely Neoptolemus' play, illuminating the struggle for the young man's soul, or only a play about the clash between a political and a universal-ethical principle, although that clash, reflected in the young man's dilemma between inborn virtue and acquired attitudes, remains of the highest importance.⁴¹ Rather, what makes this play special is, in Oscar Mandel's formulation, the 'shattering ethico-political conclusion' which the poet extracts from the myth. His is a play about the interaction between incompatible personalities and the dangers of their failure to connect.

For each of these attitudes, when rigid and carried to an extreme, cannot but fail. The Achaeans are in danger of losing their war because a person they have excluded and wronged refuses to overcome his resentments, because another sets idealistic moral principles above communal considerations, and because a third is stuck in an opportunistic mind frame that seeks success by any possible means. Sophocles allows his Neoptolemus—and us—to realize for a moment that there is something that counts for more than war and politics. 'Individual conscience will and must sometimes rebel against the commands of ... political authority', but the world as it is does not allow this to persist.⁴² Neoptolemus' decision must be reversed. As in other plays (for example, in Euripides' *Orestes*, performed a year later), only a *deus ex machina* can succeed in resolving an impasse caused by human failure to find common ground. Heracles is needed not only to bring the story back on track—after all, Philoctetes did return to Troy and Troy did fall—but also to force the characters involved to overcome profound differences in attitudes, convictions, and methods in the interest of shared (communal) needs and goals. True, Heracles' speech is rather uninspiring and emphasizes personal rather than communal aspects, but no doubts are left about the disastrous consequences, for himself and the community, of

Spahn (1986). Antiphon: Thuc. 8.68; Gagarin (2002). *Ar. Ran.* 686–705. Selfishness and treason: e.g., Alcibiades and Phrynichus: Thuc. 6.92; 8.50; persecution of enemies: see Thucydides' 'pathology of civil war': 3.82–84.

⁴¹ Philoctetes: Webster (1970) 7; cf. Mandel (1981) 36. Neoptolemus: Mandel, 103–106; inborn virtue vs. taught skills: *Phil.* 79–99, 902–903, 1006–1015; Lesky (1966) 293. Failure of one-to-one identifications: Jameson (1956) 224.

⁴² Mandel (1981) 117–120.

Neoptolemus' planned defection. Although the war has lost its lustre and patriotic motives their simple plausibility, the war still must be survived and won. Unwilling though they are, the characters must submit to this overwhelming necessity and thus to their communal obligations, and they can do so more easily if their communal motives are reinforced by powerful personal incentives.

6. Conclusion

Seven of Sophocles' more than one hundred plays survive; fragments inform us of others. I have proposed political readings of only four; valid conclusions would need to be based on a broader and more systematic study. Moreover, other scholars disagree and suggest different political interpretations or doubt, for various reasons, the justification of such interpretations. That these sometimes go too far, and thus appear arbitrary, cannot be denied; nor should it be doubted that the effort itself is justified. Tragedy was part of the intellectual ferment that pervaded Athens in the fifth century. Virtually all genres of literature reflect in some way or other an intense fascination with and concern about the two primary challenges which the Athenians faced: democracy and imperialism—political phenomena that deeply affected the ways the Athenians lived their lives and interacted with each other.⁴³ Most of the men who attended the tragic performances also participated in decision-making in the assembly and in the community's wars. To them, political issues reflected in action and speech onstage, often signalled by the poet's specific words and terminology, must have resonated in immediate ways that are no longer accessible to us. I am reluctant to generalize on the basis of the limited study I have offered in this chapter, but it seems safe to conclude that Sophocles tried, differently in each play, to illuminate typical and conflicting attitudes among the citizens, and problems emerging in their relations to each other and to their *polis* and its policies. By addressing such issues, however indirectly, and asking penetrating and unsettling questions, he raised the citizens' critical awareness and enabled them to cope better with the manifold challenges they were facing.⁴⁴

⁴³ Pervasive concern with democracy: Raaflaub (1989); a comparable study of the pervasive concern with empire and imperialism is a desideratum. Impact on life and culture: Boedeker/Raaflaub (1998); Arnason et al. (forthcoming).

⁴⁴ See esp. Nicolai (1992); Meier (1993); Boedeker/Raaflaub (2005) 122–125; see also Ferrario this volume and, though for a different period, Meier (2009).

PART VI

SOPHOCLEAN ANTHROPOLOGY: STATUS AND GENDER

WOMEN'S VOICES IN SOPHOCLES

Judith Mossman

Euripides is more often noted for his characterizations of women than Sophocles. Yet this is probably at least in part a function of the accidents of transmission. Of perhaps 123 plays of Sophocles, we have only seven complete. Of the titles we know, a substantial proportion—36—are named after a female character or chorus. Yet much influential criticism on Sophoclean characterization has tended to flatten the differences between Sophocles' male heroes and his female protagonists by focusing on what they have in common rather than what distinguishes them.¹ Other female characters are not usually discussed in terms of their individuality. And works which look closely at the language of tragedy and seek to establish whether it is gendered have usually concentrated on Aeschylus and Euripides, not on Sophocles.² There is some reason to think, however, that the selection of plays which has come down to us does not entirely do justice to Sophocles' range of female characters. Take the following fragment, which bears a remarkable resemblance to the great speech of Euripides' Medea at *Med.* 214–268, and to his *Melanippe the Wise* fr. 482 (Sophocles, *Tereus* fr. 583 Radt):³

But now I am nothing on my own. But I have often regarded the nature of women in this way, seeing that we amount to nothing. In childhood in our father's house we live the happiest life, I think, of all mankind; for folly always rears children in happiness. But when we have understanding and have come to youthful vigour, we are pushed out and sold, away from our paternal gods and from our parents, some to foreign husbands, some to barbarians, some to joyless homes, and some to homes that are opprobrious. And this, once a single night has yoked us, we must approve and consider to be happiness.

¹ Knox (1964), for example, for all its general excellence, tends to treat all the heroes in the same way, including Antigone and Electra, and cannot deal with Deianeira at all.

² E.g. McClure (1995), (1999); Mossman (2001); Chong-Gossard (2008). The principal exception known to me is Griffith (2001), whose conclusions I think are unduly pessimistic: see Mossman (2005) 355–357.

³ See Sommerstein/Fitzpatrick/Talbot (2006) 141–195 and March (2003) 139–161.

The fragment is often supposed to come from near the start of the play, but in fact would be much more appropriately placed after Procne has been told that Philomela has died. It shares with Medea's speech in Euripides the quality of appearing to generalize about the female experience while in fact concentrating quite closely on the heroine's particular case: not many Athenian women married barbarians aside from Procne herself. We do not know exactly how Procne's moral standing was treated after she revenged herself on Tereus by killing their son Itys. Fr. 589 certainly suggests that a character condemned her action, but we do not know whether the texture of the rest of the play endorsed that view or not. Either way, she was given an individual voice to impress upon the audience her side of events and interpret Philomela's enforced silence, described in fr. 595 Radt as 'the shuttle's voice'.

Tantalizing though the fragments may be, it seems best to concentrate on the extant plays for the remainder of this chapter. How does Sophocles create his women's voices? They are not heard in isolation, but as part of the fabric of each play as a whole, and so interaction with male characters and with each other can be used to make them sound female and to individualize them, shaping the audience's view of them as moral agents.⁴ Intertextuality can play a part. As well as defining Tecmessa's feminine aspect against Ajax's harsh masculinity, Sophocles alludes to the scene in *Iliad* 6 (392 ff.) between Hector and Andromache to characterize Tecmessa and her situation in *Ajax*.⁵ Andromache is a beloved royal wife, Tecmessa a captive concubine, and Hector is a very different interlocutor from Ajax. Andromache's problem is simpler than Tecmessa's: if Hector does not die, she will be happy. Tecmessa will be worse off if Ajax dies, but is far less secure than Andromache even if he does not. Tecmessa, therefore, like many female characters in tragedy, is forced to speak persuasively in her dealings with a dominant male character. Rhetorical persuasion outside tragedy is more usually associated with the male spheres of law and politics, but within tragedy (and Sophocles is no exception), women frequently both use rhetoric effectively and are defined as *personae* by the arguments and rhetorical strategies they use. Here Tecmessa shows a sensitivity in

⁴ Even if, as Griffith argues, no single linguistic feature apart from feminine adjective and participial endings can be seen as 'feminine', the feminine can still be constructed through the stylized forms of tragedy in various ways: see Griffith (2001) 121–126 and Mossman (2005) 353–354.

⁵ See Kirkwood (1965) 53–70; Easterling (1984); Mossman (2005) 355–357.

choosing her arguments which reveals a distinct and appealing character, partly precisely because she argues from a position of deadly weakness as Ajax's concubine, enslaved in the war against Troy. Her problematic status is instantly shown by her address to Ajax: she calls him 'lord Ajax'. Andromache, by contrast, had addressed Hector as *δαίμόνιε*, the force of which is hard to pin down but which seems here, as in other poetic examples, to 'create[s] intimacy between speaker and addressee and urge[s] compliance with the speaker's requests'.⁶

Tecmessa begins by reminding Ajax of fortune and that he made her a slave—this corresponds to Andromache's reminding Hector how Achilles killed her family (6. 414–428). The underlying argument is that no one is fortunate forever and what cannot be cured must be endured—but she is too tactful to express this clearly to him. She stresses her good will towards him, twice referring to their sexual relationship: 'since I have come to share your bed (*λέχος*, 491) ... by your bed (*εὐνής*), in which you have been joined with me' (493). She will return to this topic again at the end of the speech. She continues (500–505), envisaging her situation after his death:

And one of my masters shall let fall bitter words like these: "Look upon the concubine of Ajax, who was the army's mightiest man, and see what servitude she endures after being so envied!" So shall he speak, and I shall be the victim of my fate, and these words will be shameful for you and for your family.

This adaptation of a Homeric *tis*-speech—'someone (*τις*) will say ...'—prompts comparison again with *Iliad* 6, where it is Hector who imagines the scene after his own death (Ajax articulates no such imaginative leap here), but also forms part of Tecmessa's overall strategy and reveals more about her situation. From one master (Ajax) she will have many, and she uses the same word here as she used for Ajax earlier. This encourages him to pity her while allowing her to make him the focal point of her argument, as he is of her life. The imagined words are highly flattering to Ajax, and part of the evil consequences of the speech she identifies is that her downfall (and her son's) will be a disgrace for Ajax and his family. This enables her to move on from herself to Ajax's father and mother as objects of pity more compelling than she is herself; this again contrasts with Andromache's explanation that because her parents are dead her love for them is vested in Hector. Thirdly she appeals to him to pity his son, as Andromache had appealed to Hector on behalf of Astyanax; finally she returns to her own

⁶ Dickey (1996) 141.

case. This loose ring composition mirrors to some extent the structure of Andromache's speech in the *Iliad* (*Il.* 6. 432 looks back to 6. 407–409 rather as *Ajax* 514–519 reprises and expands upon *Il.* 6. 487–489); but whereas Andromache ends her speech by giving Hector military advice, Tecmessa can only return plaintively to the obligation Ajax should feel to her for the sexual pleasure she has given him. One cannot, indeed, imagine Ajax being as tolerant of Andromache's thoughts on tactics as Hector was.⁷ When Tecmessa reminds Ajax that she has no support but him, the effect is very different from when Andromache calls Hector 'my father and lady mother and brother, and you are my young husband', because Tecmessa explains again that it was Ajax who sacked her native land, though he did not himself kill her parents. This detail may recall the fact that Andromache's mother at least died of natural causes and that Achilles, although he killed her brothers and father, did not strip her father's corpse and gave him a proper funeral. It may also be that Sophocles was anxious to make sure the audience did not disapprove of Tecmessa's apparently affectionate attitude to the killer of her parents. Tecmessa's closing general reflection is also an appeal to Ajax's self-image, arguing that ingratitude is not noble. Tecmessa makes more of an impression on the Chorus than (immediately, at least) she does on Ajax, though the shorter exchanges (*ἀντιλαβή*) in 591–595 suggest that he does feel under pressure from her; nonetheless, the speech is both persuasive and subtle. Tecmessa puts forward appropriate arguments which convey a sense of her character as loving, forgiving, and loyal. Rhetoric and allusion to Homer combine to make her a sympathetic and distinctively female character.

It is instructive to compare her with Deianeira in *Trachiniae*. Both might broadly be described as 'good' women (even though Tecmessa is a concubine and Deianeira kills her husband): both seek to behave well towards their menfolk (who are both, one might say, hypermasculine)⁸ and show a sense of propriety and obedience entirely lacking in 'bad' tragic women like Aeschylus' Clytaemestra and Euripides' Medea. Apart from the obvious consideration that Deianeira has a tragic choice to make and Tecmessa does not, the tone of their speeches is quite different. One may compare the restrained reference to the vagaries of fortune in Tecmessa's speech (485–490) with Deianeira's opening words:

⁷ See Mossman (2005) 355 for some implications of Ajax's brusque command to Tecmessa to be silent at 293.

⁸ On the extreme quality of Heracles's masculinity, see Loraux (1995) 116–139; Ajax's can be seen in similar terms.

There is an ancient saying among men, once revealed to them, that you cannot understand a man's life before he is dead, so as to know whether he has had a good one or a bad one. But I know well, even before going to Hades, that the one I have is unfortunate and sorrowful.

Deianeira also has a persistent linguistic habit of qualifying what she says. There are two examples in her opening speech alone, and this is after all a prologue speech where matters of fact are being conveyed to the audience, not a deliberative speech:⁹

(7–8) I suffered painful affliction in the matter of my wedding, *if any Aetolian woman did* ... (20–30) I cannot tell of the manner of his struggle, for I know nothing of it; whoever was sitting there not terrified by the sight, he could tell you. For I was sitting there struck numb with fear that my beauty might end by giving me pain. But in the end Zeus the god of contests decided well, *if it was well*; for I clove to Heracles as the bride he had won, and always nourish one fear after another, in my anxiety for him; night brings trouble, and the succeeding night pushes it away.

Deianeira worries too much; Tecmessa is remarkably calm in her circumstances. Other features of Deianeira's speech also contribute to the creation of a distinctive, and distinctively female, character for her. Her life is entirely defined by this contested marriage. The imagery she uses is of nurturing; her image of herself as an outlying field, and of Heracles as the farmer who returns to sow and reap, puts him at the centre of everything, and herself at the edge, even though, on a geographical level, Heracles' labours usually take place further towards the edge of the Greek world, and she is actually closer to its centre than him. Deianeira's name means 'man-slayer', and so indeed she proves, so this may be an unexpected and misleading characterization for the audience: expecting a virago, they are presented with a model wife—who nonetheless will, after all, kill her husband.

Intertextuality is used later in *Trachiniae*, too, to point up the contrast between this Deianeira and another woman whose husband came home from war with a concubine—Clytaemestra.¹⁰ When Deianeira first sees Iole among the other captives, she pities her deeply:

Unhappy one, who among all young girls are you? Have you no husband, or are you a mother? You look as though you know nothing of all these things, but you are some noble person. Lichas, who among human beings is the

⁹ For discussion of this speech, see Kraus (1991) 75–98; and more generally on Deianeira and deliberation, see Hall (2009) 69–96.

¹⁰ See Easterling (1982) 21–22.

stranger? Who is her mother, and who is the father that gave her life? Tell me, because I pitied her most when I saw her, in as much as she alone can feel and understand.

The way Deianeira frames her question about Iole's family, asking first who is her mother when the conventional order would place the father first, invests the question with a maternal tenderness, especially as Deianeira has begun this speech by praying that Zeus may never inflict the misery endured by Iole and the others upon her own offspring (303–306). But ironically, Iole does in one way have a husband—he is Deianeira's. Clytaemestra clashes with a silent Cassandra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, displaying real anger for the first time in the play, and then delights in killing her along with Agamemnon. Deianeira, on the other hand, in an exchange which contrasts with Clytaemestra's haughty treatment of a silent Cassandra, questions Iole kindly and is understanding when she refuses to speak. Iole, unlike Cassandra, never speaks in this play. It would in fact be unnecessary, since Deianeira attributes her own feelings to her to such an extent that she effectively speaks for her. Unlike Clytaemestra, Deianeira does not blame her for Heracles' actions, indeed she sees her as a reflection of herself: 'I pitied her most of all when my eyes lit on her, because her beauty had destroyed her life' (463–465, cf. 24–25). When Heracles dons the robe which Deianeira has anointed with poison, believing it to be a love-potion, there is a clear allusion to *Agamemnon*, which emphasizes the contrast between the wickedness of Clytaemestra, which Heracles believes Deianeira shares, and the hapless gullibility which actually motivates her: both robes are described in the same terms. The allusion, however, serves to emphasize the difference between the two women already so clear by the contrast in their language: Clytaemestra the great manipulator of words, Deianeira the hesitant one, stumbling and sometimes rambling.

In both *Electra* and *Antigone* we are presented with two contrasting sisters whose interaction helps to characterize each. It may also be interesting to compare and contrast the two pairs of sisters. There has been much discussion of the moral status of Antigone in particular: is she a 'bad' woman, and Ismene a 'good' woman for her obedience to Creon, or is Ismene spineless in her refusal to bury Polyneices and Antigone a 'good', if unconventional character?¹¹ Is Electra wrong to wallow in her

¹¹ For a range of views, see e.g. Knox (1964) 62–116; Sourvinou-Inwood [1989] (1990); Griffith (1999) 34–38.

resentment and Chrysothemis pragmatic and sensible, or is Electra's perception of affairs correct and Chrysothemis's unduly self-interested? There seem to be clear echoes of Sophocles' *Antigone* in his *Electra*. This may imply simply that there are certain ways of writing about two sisters who in both cases are, or at least believe themselves to be, the last remnants of their families. Does this example tell against my claim that Sophocles carefully individualizes his women? There are clear indications to the contrary. Above all, the crafting of the plot of *Electra* and the introduction of Chrysothemis suggest that Sophocles wanted to allow his audience to make comparisons between these two sisters and Antigone and Ismene. Chrysothemis is not an invented character, but no other surviving dramatic version of the return of Orestes gives Electra a sister. If Sophocles had merely wanted a confidante for Electra, a Nurse would have been an easy choice, or she could have been as dependent on the Chorus for that function as Deianeira. That Chrysothemis is in the same situation as Electra, but behaves differently, gives her a special role in characterizing her. It is easy to see how the relationship of Antigone and Ismene illustrates this too. *Antigone* is recalled in the fate which Chrysothemis says awaits Electra on Aegisthus' return: being walled up in a cave at the edge of the city (*El.* 378–382). There is even a verbal echo in that both pairs of sisters are said to be left alone. In both cases this is expressed in the same way, with a very rare dual form (*Ant.* 58, *El.* 950). In repeating the device of the two sisters, and drawing attention to the repetition, then, Sophocles invites those of the audience who had seen the earlier play to relate the actions of all four women and make comparisons between them, just as he made use of allusions to Homer and Aeschylus.

The effect of this device on the characterization of Electra can best be illustrated by an examination of her speech, and Chrysothemis's answer to it, in the second of their two scenes together. Electra has been convinced by the false message (delivered by the Old Tutor) that Orestes is dead, killed in a chariot race, and has therefore dismissed Chrysothemis's report of fresh offerings on her father's tomb. Chrysothemis is convinced, too, and there is a temporary unity between the sisters when Electra asks her to help her 'lighten the weight of our present pain' (939). 'Shall I ever make the dead rise again?' asks Chrysothemis, and Electra reassures her: 'That is not what I said! I am not such a fool!' (940–941). But when Electra does outline her plan, it becomes clear that she has something very foolish indeed in mind: assassinating Aegisthus. The audience, we must remember, knows that Orestes is not dead, and that he and Paidagogos have concocted a much more practical plan to do exactly what Electra proposes here. The situation, then, undermines her utterly. Her phrasing also stresses her limited grip on

reality and the fervour with which she contemplates her vision of the future. She opens in the perfect tense ('I have determined', 947), which indicates that, as far as she is concerned, her intention is fixed. Like Tecmessa, she uses a Homeric *tis*-speech (on which see above) to describe the admiration the murder of Aegisthus will gain the two sisters (975–985):

Which of the citizens or strangers when he sees us will not greet us with praise? "Look on these sisters, friends, who preserved their father's house, who when their enemies were firmly based took no thought of their lives, but stood forth to avenge murder! All should love them, all should reverence them; all should honour them at feasts and among the assembled citizens for their courage!" Such things will be said of us by all men, so that in life and death our fame will never die.

It has been argued that Electra here is figuring herself and Chrysothemis as tyrannicides in the mould of Harmodius and Aristogeiton,¹² and indeed this speech does raise questions, to which I shall return shortly, about Electra's mismatching of gender roles. The formulation of the imagined speech is unusual in a number of ways. It is longer than any Homeric example except for the speech of Nausicaa at *Od.* 6. 276–284; its imagined content is positive rather than negative; and it is introduced by the unusual formula 'Which ... will not?'.¹³ All of these formal features add a sense of unreality to the vision. The idea that two women who killed a king would be treated as public heroes for the deed is indeed fantastic. Electra is seeing herself and Chrysothemis as substitutes for Orestes, and therefore free of the cultural constraints placed on women both in the Athenian world outside the theatre and within the rest of the play, where her mere presence outside the palace is censured by Clytaemestra and where the male characters feel no need to take her into their confidence, let alone admire her for anything she may do herself. Characters who transgress these constraints (like Clytaemestra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*) rarely prosper for long in tragedy. Not that Electra is really very like the 'man-counselling' heart of Clytaemestra, despite her use of the term *ἀνδρεία* (= 'courage', literally 'manliness') as the term of praise she imagines they will receive at 983. For one thing her resentment is articulated in terms of the deprivation of marriage she has undergone (962) and the chief incentive she holds out for Chrysothemis, apart from this imagined praise, is a good marriage (971–972)—but the inappropriateness of her vision for two unmarried women

¹² See Juffras (1991) and MacLeod (2001) 140–148.

¹³ See Bers (1997) 59–60 and Finglass (2007) on 973–985.

underlines its flawed and ill-conceived aspect. Chrysothemis is swift to put her finger on what is wrong (992–998), commenting to the alarmed Chorus, and to her mother:¹⁴

Before giving tongue, women, she would have preserved caution, if she had good sense, but she does not preserve it! Why, with what aim in view do you arm yourself with such rashness and call on me to second you? Do you not see? You are a woman, not a man, and your strength is less than that of your adversaries.

This is a brusquer version of what Ismene says to Antigone at *Ant.* 58–68 (note that Ismene uses the first person plural rather than the second, and also that the rare dual mentioned earlier is also found in this speech):¹⁵

And now consider how much the worse will be the fate of *us two, who are left alone*, if in despite of the law we flout the decision of the ruler or his power. Why, we must remember that we are women, who cannot fight against men, and then that we are ruled by those whose power is greater, so that we must consent to this and to other things even more painful! So I shall beg those beneath the earth to be understanding, since I act under constraint, but I shall obey those in authority; for there is no sense in actions that exceed our powers.

Chrysothemis, although she promises not to reveal what Electra has said, is much less tactful with her than Ismene is with Antigone; Electra is far less realistic than Antigone, and after all, Antigone does in fact achieve her aim of burying Polyneices, in itself a much easier proposition than the assassination of a ruling tyrant. The emphasis in Electra's speech here is on a hunger for praise which acquires considerable pathos given the weight of abuse heaped on her by Clytaemestra, and even by Chrysothemis. Antigone, no fantasist, seems in her first scene to be driven partly by personal outrage that Creon could expect her of all people to accept his commands (32). She is in fact far more haughty and hostile to Creon than Electra is to Clytaemestra, despite the latter's complaints (on which see further below); and although she declares that 'I have no enemies by birth, but I have friends by birth' (or 'I was born to join in love, not in hatred'), she is unforgiving to Ismene. Nonetheless, she attempts to join in her suffering: 'I do not tolerate a loved one who shows her love only in words' (543). Electra spends much more effort trying to persuade Chrysothemis, for all that she is so much harsher to Electra than Ismene is to Antigone.

¹⁴ Contrast Oedipus's praise for his daughters at *OC* 337–345, where his sons sit at home 'like maidens' and his daughters 'bear the burdens of [their] unhappy father's sorrows'.

¹⁵ See Finglass (2007) on 992–1014.

Electra is saved from any ill-advised attempt at action by the re-emergence of Orestes; her part then becomes to urge him on, to pray for his success, and to play a part for Aegisthus when he returns. Her last speech urges Orestes to kill Aegisthus. The fate of Electra and Orestes after the play remains obscure, though many readers have thought that despite the lack of direct condemnation of their actions in the play there can be no escaping the conclusion that they will somehow be punished for their matricide, as in the other dramatic versions of the story. Antigone, who does act, is vindicated by events, but not explicitly in the mouths of any of the characters. The closest anyone comes to saying she is right is Haemon, who claims to Creon that he is quoting anonymous citizens (692–700):

But for me it is possible to hear undercover this, how the city is lamenting for this girl, saying that no woman ever deserved it less, but that she is to perish miserably for actions that are glorious, she who did not allow her own brother who had fallen in the slaughter to remain unburied or to be destroyed by savage dogs or birds. Does she not deserve, they ask, to be honoured with a golden prize? Such is the dark saying that is silently advancing.

This account has none of the bombast of Electra's fantasy of praise, but works up gradually to its climax of honour for Antigone. The stealthy nature of these supposed murmurings (of whose truth it is hard to be sure, since Haemon has a clear motive for convincing Creon not to murder his beloved Antigone by any means he thinks may succeed) is emphasized by the oxymoronic picture of speech advancing in silence, and contrasts sharply with the picture of public honour in Electra's mind. Antigone dies; but it is possible to see death as what she wanted all along (555, 559–560). More problematic is what happens to Ismene and to Chrysothemis, both of whom disappear from their respective plays without any clear indication of their future. Ismene is taken inside with Antigone, who has rejected her despite her spirited support, at 582. She cries at 566 'How can I live alone without her?', but we never hear of her death and may assume she survives: Creon certainly says at 770–771 he will not condemn her to death. Her last words onstage are about Antigone, an admission of failure to persuade Creon: 'It is decided, it seems, that she must die.' Antigone conspicuously does not mention her, though she dwells on the fates of the rest of her family. Ismene is unforgiven by her, though perhaps not by the audience. Chrysothemis, in characteristically blunt manner, goes inside with a warning (1055–1057): 'Well, if you think you are showing some sense, think like that! For when you are already in trouble, you will approve my words'. She is never mentioned again; but if the ending of the play encourages the audience to believe there is trouble ahead for the matricides, the audience might think back to this

passage and wonder if Chrysothemis did not, for all her lack of sympathy, have a point. In both cases the more conventional sibling ends up inside the house, while the troublemaking sister remains outside.¹⁶

This brings us back to the question of proper behaviour for female characters in tragedy. It is not justifiable to condemn a female character simply for being onstage (and therefore outside) or for speaking; the mythological settings of the plays distance them somewhat from fifth-century Athens and its social conventions. At times very well-behaved female characters (like Aeschylus' Electra) are outside for perfectly good reasons (compare the Homeric Andromache in *Iliad* 6). But some women in Sophocles are explicitly criticized for being onstage, and both Electra and Antigone are among those who are told they should not be where they are (*El.* 516, *Ant.* 579, the same word used in both places). Women's speech acts, similarly, may come under fire, but may also pass as normal in a way which our non-dramatic sources suggest would not generally have been the case in fifth-century Athens. Female characters may use rhetorical tropes of great sophistication in a way which not only creates an elaborate argument but also contributes to creating a character.

There are many illustrations of this. In choosing Clytaemestra's speech at *Electra* 516–551—the speech which heralds the start of the formal debate, or agon, and which is clearly a speech of a 'bad' woman—I do not imply that 'bad' women use rhetorical figures more than 'good' women, since this is demonstrably not true. Tecmessa's rhetoric is less formally expressed than Clytaemestra's in *Electra* 516–551, but it is no less carefully crafted. Electra's response to Clytaemestra's speech is just as formal, and her rhetoric just as revealing.

Clytaemestra's opening is aggressive, and based on criticism of Electra's undisciplined action (being out of the house) and speech (her unbridled criticism of Clytaemestra). Clytaemestra seeks to put Electra at a disadvantage by neutralizing her clearest cause for complaint, namely her grievance about the death of her father (525–533):¹⁷

Your father, and nothing else, is always your pretext, because I killed him. I know it well; I cannot deny it. Yes, Justice was his killer, not I alone, and you would take her side, if you happened to have sense. Why, that father of yours, whom you are always lamenting, alone among the Greeks brought himself to sacrifice your sister to the gods, though he felt less pain when he begot her than I did when I bore her.

¹⁶ See Finglass (2007) on 1057.

¹⁷ See Finglass (2007) on 534–546.

The claim that Clytaemestra was right to kill him, and Electra wrong to mourn him, is harshly paradoxical and requires hard argument to back it up. Clytaemestra here, as also in Euripides' *Electra* but not Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*, justifies her claim with reference to Iphigeneia. She reinforces the argument with hypophora, the anticipation and pre-emptive demolition of an opponent's case, to a remarkable degree. This is the longest passage of hypophora in tragedy, and although it drifts somewhat away from pure hypophora and becomes more of an exercise in ostensibly logical thinking, its persistent questions, quickly answered, in some cases by other questions, are rhetorically impressive. But this mode of argumentation invests Clytaemestra with a harsh and hectoring manner (534–547):

For whose sake did he sacrifice her? Will you say for that of the Argives? But they had no right to kill her, who was mine. But if he killed her who was mine for his brother Menelaus, was he not to pay the penalty to me? Had not Menelaus two children, who ought to have died in preference to her, since it was for the sake of their father and mother that the voyage took place? Had Hades a desire to feed on my children rather than on hers? Or did your accursed father feel sorrow for the children of Menelaus, but none for mine? Is that not like a father who was foolish and lacked judgment? I think so, even if I differ from your judgment.

Rhetorical display here combines with a relentless tone which emphasizes the hostility between the two antagonists in this 'debate'—a debate which, as so often in tragedy, solves nothing. Some of the arguments are also found in a slightly different form at the equivalent point of Euripides' *Electra*; but expressions like 'Had Hades a desire to feed on my children rather than on hers?' raise the tone of Sophocles' Clytaemestra to a different pitch of savagery. The expression also evokes the family history of the house of Atreus and the Thyestean banquet of the previous generation, perhaps hinting at the Aeschylean theme of the family curse. Clytaemestra's clinching argument takes hypophora to a different, less logical level: 'She who died would say so, if she could acquire a voice.' This is a harsher version of the more lyrical (in every sense) passage in Aeschylus where Clytaemestra imagines the dead Iphigeneia greeting her father in Hades (Aesch. *Ag.* 1555–1559).¹⁸ Aeschylus' Clytaemestra paints a picture of a forgiving Iphigeneia which seems to complement the Chorus' portrayal of her in the *parodos* as the ornament of her father's house, singing for his friends (Aesch. *Ag.* 242–246);

¹⁸ See Finglass (2007) on 548, though I disagree with his characterization of the Aeschylus passage as sarcastic.

she does not assimilate her to her own point of view. Clytaemestra's co-option here of Iphigeneia, by contrast, completes the bullying tone of her attack. Electra too claims that she will 'speak for' Iphigeneia (555). The fact that she never really does so, that she is too preoccupied with defending her father against all of Clytaemestra's charges, fair or not, and that she too matches hypophora with hypophora at 591–592, suggests a subtle resemblance between these two characters. Electra ends her speech by saying sarcastically 'call me bad or loud-mouthed or full of shamelessness; for if I am expert in such behaviour, I think I am no unworthy child of yours!' Like mother, like daughter, if not yet in deed, then in vehemence of hatred.

So far, then, we have seen Sophocles using rhetoric and intertextuality to characterize his female figures. We have considered three characters who make tragic choices (Deianeira, Electra, and Antigone), one who does not (Tecmessa) and one who has done so in the fictional past but does not in the action of the play (Clytaemestra). I would like to conclude by looking at a character whose contribution to her play has perhaps been underestimated: Eurydice in *Antigone*.¹⁹ There are some interesting comparisons to be made between her and Jocasta in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, whose portrayal is deliberately understated.

The character of Eurydice, as Griffith has shown, is probably invented, and her existence is not revealed before her entrance at 1180. Her first words establish her character:

EURYDICE: All you citizens, I heard the news as I was about to leave the house so as to go to address prayers to the goddess Pallas; and I chanced to be loosening the bolt of the gate to open it when the accent of disaster in the house struck my ears, and in terror I fell back into the arms of my servants, and was struck dumb. But whatever the news was, tell it again! For you will have a listener not without experience of disaster.

Like Jocasta at *Oedipus Tyrannus* 911, Eurydice leaves the house for a religious purpose (see also Hecuba and the other Trojan women at *Iliad* 6. 293–311). She hears an intimation of bad news just as she loosens the bolt, on the cusp of leaving the protection of the house from which Antigone and Ismene also emerged, with fatal consequences. Her reaction at first is to be struck dumb, and she will be silent again when she hears the full story onstage and goes into the house, as Deianeira is (*Trach.* 813). It is, however, instructive to compare Eurydice's silent exit into the house with Jocasta's at

¹⁹ Griffith (1999) on 1185–1256 is unusual in the generosity of his treatment of Eurydice. See also Griffith (2001) 133–136.

Oedipus Tyrannus 1072, when she realizes that she cannot prevent Oedipus from summoning the shepherd. Eurydice says nothing; we know she has left because the Chorus and the messenger have the following exchange (1244–1256):

CHORUS: What do you make of this? The lady has departed, before uttering a good or a bad word.

MESSENGER: I too am afraid, but I am sustained by hope that after hearing of the sorrows of her son she will not demand a lamentation in the city, but will order her servants to mourn a private sorrow in the house, indoors; for she is free from the inexperience in judgment that might lead to error.

CHORUS: I do not know; but to me both excessive silence and loud crying to no end seem grievous.

MESSENGER: Well, we shall know, whether indeed she is not hiding some secret purpose in her impassioned heart, by entering the house. Yes, you are right; excessive silence also has its dangers.

Jocasta, on the other hand, leaves with a parting couplet which predicts future silence and then is described as silence (1071–1075):

JOCASTA: Ah, ah, unhappy one! That is all I can say to you, and nothing anymore!

CHORUS: Why has the lady sped away, Oedipus, in bitter pain? I am afraid evil may burst forth after this silence.

Some attempt has been made by the commentators to explain this: Jebb suggests interpreting 'silence' as 'reticence'; Dawe tentatively identifies her words as an aside which the Chorus does not hear.²⁰ But Jocasta's speaking about silence is almost a kind of performative, like Hamlet's 'The rest is silence': it stresses the reduction of the firm and vocal Jocasta, who could speak so freely and persuasively to Oedipus, to the silence of shame and death. It is no accident that Jocasta's cry 'Ah, ah!' prefigures Oedipus's when he discovers the truth, nor that the whole couplet revolves around how she is to address him. The choral comment in fact makes perfect sense: it refers to the silence she has predicted, which supplants the articulacy of the past.

The entire description of Eurydice's silence, on the other hand, tends to confirm the picture of her created by her opening words as a conventional and virtuous wife, a blameless character in a house burdened with terrible conflicts,²¹ someone who can be relied upon not to make too much fuss, to

²⁰ See Jebb (1902) on 1072; Dawe (1982) on 1075.

²¹ See Griffith (1999) on 1180–1256.

behave properly, to keep what should be private out of the public sphere (in conspicuous contrast to the confusion made of the two by Creon and indeed Polyneices and Eteocles). But the Chorus, in convincing the messenger of their forebodings, convince the audience too, and it is no real surprise when her death is announced. More shocking is her reported speech: although she said so little onstage, we vicariously witness her death and hear her last words (in contrast to Jocasta and Deianeira, both of whom die alone: 1301–1305):

MESSANGER: Pierced by the sharp sword ... near the altar, she ... closed her darkening eyes, after she had lamented the empty marriage-bed of Megareus, who died earlier, and again of Haemon, and at the last had called down curses upon you, the killer of your son.

Deianeira and Jocasta both die on or near their marriage-beds, but Eurydice dies near an altar, perhaps that of Zeus, shunning the bed she shared with Creon.²² The marriage-bed which dominates her thoughts is not her own but those of her sons, who should have carried on the family. She thinks of them not as political entities, but as family, as Creon should have done, but did not. And at the last her silence is broken, by lamentation and by curses.²³ She dies in the same way as Haemon (1315–1316), which further seems to emphasize Creon's isolation from his family. Another detail associates her with Antigone: the messenger calls her *παμμήτωρ*, 'own mother' of Haemon, or perhaps 'completely a mother' when he announces her death (1282). This seems to be the only usage of this compound to mean this rather than 'mother of all', and it parallels the striking use of *αὐτάδελφον*, 'own sister' in line 1 by Antigone speaking to Ismene.²⁴ Eurydice does not share the sisters' pervertedly endogamic origin, but she does share their complete emotional commitment to family in a way that none of the male characters does.

In conclusion, Sophocles can be seen to create an impressive variety of individualized female characters in the extant plays. There is every indication that he laboured just as much as Euripides to render them carefully and to make them sound both female and different from one another, and simultaneously to make even minor characters contribute in important ways to the overall design of his plays. Later critics often underestimated this, yet sometimes still expressed their appreciation of Sophocles' oeuvre as a whole in terms of the poet's creation of a female figure, an allegory of tragedy, a

²² For discussion of these death-scenes and their significance, see Loraux (1987).

²³ On lamentation as a particularly female kind of speech, see McClure (1999) 40–47.

²⁴ See Griffith (1999) on 1 and 1282–1283.

Muse. So Censor Dramaticus writes in the late eighteenth century: 'All the three [poets] have done for tragedy what the fables say the gods did in favour of Pandora. Aeschylus, who first opened the blossoms of tragedy, gave her an air a little rude, marked her with strokes too strong, made her advance too hastily, and assigned her gigantic appearance rather than the appearance of a heroine. Sophocles reduced her (according to the expression of Horace) to the decent appearance of a matron.'²⁵ At about the same time, Robert Potter agreed that: 'Sophocles had a noble elevation of mind, but tempered with so fine a taste and so chastised a judgement, that he never passes the bounds of propriety; under his conduct the Tragic Muse appears with the chaste dignity of some noble matron at a religious solemnity; harmony is in her voice and grace in all her motions'.²⁶ I hope to have shown that when the words of Sophocles' women are closely examined, their voices speak more discordantly, but also with more dramatic truth and more distinctive tones than these verdicts imply.

²⁵ Censor Dramaticus (1793) 105–106.

²⁶ Potter (1808) iv. I owe these last two references to Cressida Ryan.

MINOR CHARACTERS IN SOPHOCLES*

Bernhard Zimmermann

1. Introduction

The division of a play's characters, that is, of the figures who partake in the dramatic action, into leading roles and minor roles, into tragic heroes (or heroines) and others, i.e. those who are less important for the development of the plot, is not such an easy task as one might first imagine. For example, the modern debate on the question of the principal character in Sophocles' *Antigone* is immense. In those cases where a tragedy is named after one of the *dramatis personae*, the title can, although will not always, help us arrive at a decision. On the other hand, the poets often veil this by naming the play after its chorus, even when the chorus has no significant role to play, such as in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. Occasionally the title can even be consciously misleading and can set the audience on the wrong track with regard to the play's contents or characters. One could cite Aristophanes' *Frogs* or Euripides' *Phoenician Women* as conspicuous examples of this.

Some general introductory, theoretical reflections on *dramatis personae* therefore seem unavoidable.¹ To begin with, two approaches should be discarded: first, that which is predicated upon a purely quantitative analysis, creating a hierarchy of a play's characters based upon the number of lines they speak, and second, that based on a simple differentiation between speaking and silent characters. The importance of a character for any given play can only, and wholly in accordance with Aristotle's *Poetics*, be considered in terms of that character's integration into his or her respective myth; in other words, in terms of the character's participation and function within the dramatic plot. Most important is the character's relationship to the tragic conflict that develops out of the plot as well as to the tragic theme of the play.² When we conceive of the plot structure of a tragedy as being

* Translated from the German by Jasper Donelan.

¹ Cf. Zimmermann (2011) 540–553.

² The term 'tragic theme' refers to the underlying situation that provides the impetus for the tragedy's plot and the development of that plot. Generally we can identify two tragic

made up of concentric rings encircling the tragic theme at the centre—what we might label the tragic constellation³—then a type of hierarchy comes to light in which we can differentiate between leading and minor roles according to a character's distance from the centre and thus from the tragic theme.

On the other hand, the tragic conflict which leads to catastrophe (or almost does so, in the case of plays ending with a *deus ex machina* scene) is the result of a collision between different 'structures' or 'fields of authority'. Griffith (2005b) identifies four 'fields of authority' in the tragedies of the fifth century. These already contain innate tensions and can lead to further tensions when they collide. They are (1) the public, sociopolitical field, (2) the domestic field, (3) the religious field, and (4) the cultural field, by which last we should understand the authority of tradition, as well as of various forms of knowledge. It should be emphasized that these groups are not rigid entities, but rather that some characters belong to more than one grouping and thereby move between the fields, creating points of contact between them. This is true above all for the chorus (and chorus leader), who, depending on their characterization in the play, can belong to any of the fields of authority.

When we adopt this, in the best sense of the word, Aristotelian approach, i.e. one that considers myth in terms of plot, then characters that have a mythological/literary 'biography' such as Polyneices or Creon in *Oedipus at Colonus* can still have the status of minor characters, given that they do not have any proximity to the play's tragic theme. Indeed, looked at from this point of view, even Athena in the prologue of *Ajax* can be considered a minor character.

2. *Minor Characters*

The preceding considerations make clear that an attempt at such a general classification would require a comprehensive structural analysis of Sophoclean tragedy based solely on the dramatic constellation. However, such an

themes, one that lies further back in the past and one that is immediate and current. For example, in *Antigone* there is the fraternal dispute (Theme I) and then the burial ban as a result of that dispute (Theme II); likewise, Ajax being dishonoured through the awarding of Achilles' arms to Odysseus (Theme I) and the attempted act of revenge carried out in the hero's fit of madness (Theme II). In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, all of the themes that lie at the heart of the play run together into one at the end. Cf. Zimmermann (2011) 586.

³ Cf. Pfister (1977) 220–264; Pollheim (1996) 10.

undertaking is in this essay neither possible nor desirable. Rather, in what follows, the 'minor characters' will be considered to be those who firstly are far from the tragic centre, and secondly occupy a secondary position in terms of the four fields of authority.⁴ First of all are the non-speaking characters (χωρὰ πρόσωπα) that represented an additional cost (παραχορήγημα) for the *chorêgos*.⁵ From a dramaturgical point of view we ought to distinguish two groups. On the one hand we find the non-speaking characters who have a fixed place in the literary tradition and are often given a dramaturgically important function in the play's action by the poet, and who therefore cannot be counted as minor characters. Examples include Eurysaces in *Ajax*, Iole in *Trachiniae*, Pylades in *Electra* and Antigone and Ismene in the *exodos* of *Oedipus Tyrannus*.⁶ True minor characters on the other hand are all of the non-speaking and anonymous figures who attend an important character onstage as servants, slaves or companions, or those who are used to carry objects on and off the stage. In this way they are comparable to the extras of modern theatre. The presence of such figures may have been significantly higher than what we can gather from the 'internal didaskalia'—the stage indications that the poets incorporated into their texts. It is likely, for instance, that rulers, kings, and queens always appeared with an entourage.⁷ When this is not the case, it is emphasized in order to draw our attention to the rarity of the situation: it indicates that a figure has been isolated and cast out from society (Polyneices in *Oedipus at Colonus* 1249) or has lost everything, such as Xerxes in Aeschylus' *Persians*.

Although these servants must have contributed to the dramatic effect, this is much more so the case in the 'mass scenes' where the poets could bring on a sort of second chorus and a second chorus leader. In the prologue

⁴ For minor characters in this sense, cf. Jouanna (2007) 347–356; Ebbott (2005) speaks of 'marginal figures'. Accordingly, choruses of slaves or of prisoners or the chorus of soldiers from Salamis who suffer under Ajax's act of madness would also count as minor characters. A discussion of choruses has been left out of the present study.

⁵ Cf. Zimmermann (2011) 502.

⁶ In *Antigone* Eurydice speaks only eight lines (1183–1190).

⁷ An example is *Ajax* 1047 and 1226: Menelaus (cf. 1115) and Agamemnon will not appear as generals without an accompaniment (heralds). Similar is Creon in *Antigone* 162 ff. and 491 ff., and with maids (δμῶες) at 578 ff. Male and female servants are present at *Ajax* 542 ff. Servants bring the reluctant shepherd in *Oedipus Tyrannus* to be interrogated (cf. 1114). See also Creon and Theseus in *OC* 728 ff., 887 ff., 1099 ff. (cf. 826, 897), Odysseus (*Phil.* 1003) is accompanied by two soldiers, Clytaemestra (*El.* 516 ff.) arrives with female servants (cf. 634), cf. Finglass (2007) 286. Teiresias is accompanied by a boy in *Antigone* (988–990) and by several people in *Oedipus Tyrannus* (297).

of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the band of Theban citizens led by a priest, who also acts as their spokesperson, turn to the king for help. In this encounter with the people Oedipus is introduced as a benevolent and paternal ruler (cf. τέχνα, 1). In *Trachiniae*, the group of captured women from Oichalia is brought before Deianeira by Lichas, who adopts, so to speak, the role of chorus leader (225 ff.). Heracles' beloved Iole stands out from the group (307); she is the only one of the women to have a name and yet, she remains silent. A second scene with several silent characters is found in the second half of the Heracles tragedy. Here, the dying hero is carried onto the stage by servants who are led by an old man representing them as their leader (973 ff.). He later hands over his task to Heracles' son Hyllus (1018). Similar to the priest in *Oedipus Tyrannus* or the old man in *Trachiniae* is the role played by the citizen of Colonus in the prologue of *OC* (36 ff.). He is the representative and harbinger of the Chorus of citizens from the deme of Colonus (cf. 78 f.) before they appear themselves and confront the asylum-seeking Oedipus.

3. Messengers

Minor characters who do speak mostly appear in the role of messengers. Their task is to report events that occur either behind the scenes or away from the stage action. Depending on their dramatic function, we can divide these messengers into two groups. First are those whose only task consists in giving their report and who, aside from the cries of lament with which they manifest their sorrow and express their sympathy (*Ajax* 736), have no individual traits.⁸ With regard to their social standing, these messengers are slaves who have a close emotional link with the ruling house (cf. *Antigone* 1190, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1223–1226).⁹ Second are the messengers who, sometimes anonymous and sometimes given a name, have a role to play in the σύστασις τῶν πραγμάτων—in the plot of the play. From within the framework of the plot they are given a characterization that is reflected in their intentions and reactions and even in their manner of speaking. In terms of these messengers' social status there is, with the exception of Lichas in *Trachiniae*

⁸ *Ajax* 719 ff. (Teucer's return, Calchas' oracle), *Antigone* 1155 ff. (Antigone's and Haemon's deaths), 1278 ff. (Eurydices' suicide), *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1223 ff. (Jocasta's suicide, Oedipus' blinding), *Oedipus at Colonus* 1579 ff. (Oedipus' disappearance).

⁹ In *Ajax* the messenger is also a simple soldier, as his address to the Chorus of soldiers makes clear (ἄνδρες φίλοι, 719).

(453),¹⁰ no difference to the first group. They are also slaves, but they do exhibit a particular attachment to their masters which goes beyond that of the first group.

With her eventual advice to send someone for information about Heracles' fate (49–60), namely Deianeira's and Heracles' son Hyllus, Deianeira's old nurse (cf. 870, 873) demonstrates a pragmatic sense typical of servants.¹¹ Her close relationship with her master is evident. Her familiarity is conveyed by the polite suggestion that free citizens should take to heart the sensible advice offered by their slaves (52 f.). After her master's suicide the role of messenger is also passed on to the nurse (899–946). Her emotional involvement is expressed here by a lyric introduction (862–898) to the more rational messenger speech. A similar confidant role is played by the pedagogue in *Electra* (cf. 23). However, his participation in the development of the plot is significantly more important than that of the nurse in *Trachiniae*. He leads Orestes and Pylades to Argos, he has local knowledge (1–10), he reminds Orestes of Apollo's instructions, and he incites Orestes to go through with the act of revenge (21, 1326 ff.). Above all, he has a decisive part to play in the stratagem leading to Aegisthus' and Clytaemestra's murder: it is he who brings Clytaemestra the false report of Orestes' death (660 ff.). In comparison with Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*, in which the pedagogue character is missing, the Sophoclean pedagogue in *Electra* performs both the role of the Aeschylean Pylades—he reminds Orestes of Apollo's instructions (cf. Aesch. *Cho.* 900–903)—and part of that of Orestes—he delivers the false news of the hero's death (cf. *Cho.* 674 ff.).

A dramaturgically interesting variation on minor characters as confidants appears in *Trachiniae* in the battle of loyalties fought out by Lichas, Heracles' faithful envoy, and the anonymous messenger who is attached to Deianeira. Whereas the apprehensive Lichas is intent on concealing Iole's identity in order to protect his master (314 ff.) and, as his faithful servant, goes as far as showing insubordination to his mistress (414), the anonymous messenger wants to bring the truth to light with violence. A 'messenger duel' which is comparable from a dramaturgical perspective is found in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, although in this case the loyalties of both parties are for Oedipus. The Corinthian messenger delivers the supposedly good news of the death of the Corinthian king (924 ff.) and, upon interrogation, conceals the fact that Oedipus is not the son of the Corinthian royal pair. The old Theban

¹⁰ Cf. Davies (1991) 132.

¹¹ Cf. Davies (1991) 55.

shepherd tries in vain to conceal Oedipus' origins and only through the use of violence is he forced to admit everything (1110 ff.).

The minor character who is most clearly endowed with personal traits is the watchman in *Antigone*, who appears twice as messenger.¹² He appears first in order to announce the violation of the burial ban (223 ff.) and then, separated only by the first *stasimon* (332–383), to deliver the (as far as he is concerned) joyous news that the perpetrator Antigone has been arrested (384 ff.). Sophocles brings an ordinary citizen (or slave) onto the stage whose livelihood is directly affected by the events in the royal palace. His negligence can indeed have life-threatening consequences for him and he awkwardly twists and turns in a manner displaying comic elements before finally announcing the bad news to an incensed Creon. In what is an unusual situation for the watchman—being in the presence of a noble ruler—he makes a noted effort to adopt a high diction, or rather a diction that he feels is appropriate for the sovereign, and in this way he repeatedly commits stylistic blunders. His goal is survival, but with no consideration for the values that, as they are represented in the tragedy by the two antagonists Creon and Antigone, collide: 'this Guard is one of the more colourful characters in Greek tragedy: a garrulous, cowardly, yet witty figure whose selfish preoccupations and practical perspective throw into relief the more high-minded ideals of the main characters'.

4. *Epilogue*

The analysis shows that, aside from the purely functional use of minor characters as anonymous messengers, Sophocles also uses these familiar figures to incorporate, as it were, a second layer into his plays. This additional level contrasts the tragic world of the protagonists with that of the common folk who, on the one hand, suffer under the decisions and actions of the tragic figures, and are therefore brought into situations of conflict, dangerous for their well-being, but on the other present us with a different, non-tragic point of view—that of the humble person.

¹² Cf. Griffith (1999) 164 f.

PART VII

INSTRUCTING THE *POLIS*: EDUCATION, PHILOSOPHY, IRONY

SOPHOCLES AND EDUCATION

Justina Gregory

1. Introduction

Education is fundamental to tragedy in two ways. In the fifth century the tragic poets were regarded as their fellow citizens' instructors, and the genre itself was understood to have a didactic purpose, function, or effect.¹ This dimension, extensively discussed in recent years, will be tangential to the present chapter. Education as a dramatic motif, which has received less attention, is instead the focus of what follows.

Critical discussions of education within tragedy tend to take as their point of departure either the *anagnôrisis* ('moment of recognition') described by Aristotle or the initiatory sequence developed by van Gennepe.² Aristotle suggests that *anagnôrisis*, involving 'a change from ignorance to knowledge' (*Poet.* 52a30–31) and coinciding with *peripeteia* ('reversal of fortune'), is characteristic of the best complex plots. Although Aristotle restricts *anagnôrisis* to recognitions of personal identity, modern scholars have not hesitated to apply the term in a wider sense. Thus Rutherford regards *anagnôrisis* as 'a sub-class of a broader and more significant kind of recognition, which I should prefer to call "realization"'.³ Yet there is more to tragic education than *anagnôrisis* even broadly defined. Education, after all, takes place over a period of time as well as in moments of insight, and it involves teaching as well as learning. Both aspects are crucial to the motif as it unfolds in tragedy.

Three extant tragedies by Sophocles—*Antigone*, *Electra*, *Philoctetes*—are dominated by adolescents, while a fourth, *Trachiniae*, allots Heracles' son Hyllus an important secondary role. Their youthfulness is central to their characterization; Antigone, for example, betrays her inexperience when

¹ See Gregory (1991) 1–17 and (2002); Croally (1994) 17–69 and (2005); and Heath (2006), all with additional bibliography.

² For a distinctive lexical approach, see Coray (1993) 223–354.

³ Rutherford (1982) 147.

she offers an account of marriage and childbearing that is purely theoretical.⁴ Indeed, adolescents are prominent not just in Sophocles but in Greek tragedy generally, and two influential hypotheses have been advanced to explain this prominence.

The first hypothesis is that of Vidal-Nacquet. Drawing on van Gennep's three-stage model of the rite of passage (separation, liminality, reintegration), Vidal-Nacquet interprets Sophocles' Neoptolemus, together with other youthful figures of myth and tragedy, as instantiating the liminal phase. According to Vidal-Nacquet's 'law of symmetrical inversion',⁵ the Greek ephebe ('adolescent') passes through a transitional period in which he behaves in a manner diametrically opposed to that of the mature hoplite. He occupies the geographical margins of his community rather than the centre, he relies on deception rather than force, and his sexuality diverges from the normative orientation of the adult male.

Vidal-Nacquet's hypothesis has been challenged on terminological, chronological, and contextual grounds. 'Ephebe' denotes both an adolescent and a soldier in training, a member of the Athenian military organization known as the *ephebeia*. Vidal-Nacquet applies the term in the latter sense to the youthful characters of fifth-century tragedy, but such a usage is problematic, for the *ephebeia* as an institution of the *polis* is attested first in the fourth century. As Sommerstein observes, not only was there no organized military service for adolescents in fifth-century Athens, there is also 'little if any evidence for the existence of traditional rituals associated with the ephebic age-range'.⁶ Vidal-Nacquet's ritual explanation is at variance with tragedy's fifth-century context.

Winkler's is the second influential account of tragedy's initiatory function. For Winkler, 'the City Dionysia was a social event focused on ... young warriors',⁷ and tragic choruses were composed of enlisted men whose dancing constituted military training, since it incorporated patterns and movements characteristic of hoplite formations. This hypothesis, like Vidal-Nacquet's, is vitiated by the lack of evidence for an institutionalized *ephebeia* in fifth-century Athens. Moreover, it misinterprets Athenian dance culture. Marching to music was a Spartan rather than an Athenian practice; the tragic chorus was often made up of veteran performers rather than novices;

⁴ See *Ant.* 909–910 and Gregory (2006) 122.

⁵ Vidal-Nacquet (1981) 155.

⁶ Sommerstein (1996b) 56. For additional criticism of Vidal-Nacquet's arguments, see Dodd (2002) and Polinskaya (2002).

⁷ Winkler (1990) 37.

and dancing is associated with peace, not war.⁸ Winkler's paradigm is no more persuasive than Vidal-Naquet's.

Since a fundamental aspect of education is change over time, the topic is more fruitfully investigated by considering the factors that enable or impede development (intellectual, emotional, ethical) at any age than by concentrating on the transition from youth to maturity. In what follows I discuss four aspects of Greek thought that bear on the possibility, nature, and extent of change over time: age-class systems; the contrast between natural endowment and acculturation; theories of cultural development; and the connection between suffering and learning.⁹ Each of these is variously envisaged in archaic literature and becomes subject to additional modifications in the fifth century. To consider how they are handled first in the archaic tradition and then in Sophoclean tragedy is to open up the issue of the playwright's relationship to the currents of intellectual innovation that flowed through Athens in the fifth century BC. Sophocles, it will emerge, is less of a traditionalist than is sometimes claimed.¹⁰

Citing Plato and Aristotle on age as the fundamental organizing principle of the *polis*, Sallares argues that age-class organization was intrinsic to Athenian social structures even though it is explicitly attested only for Sparta and Crete.¹¹ Building on Sallares, Davidson emphasizes 'how *saturated* with age-class distinctions the [Athenian] culture was'¹² and notes the readiness of age-class societies to 'put age on stage'.¹³ A consideration of how Sophocles puts age on stage gives us an initial purchase on the motif of education in his tragedies.

2. Age-Class Systems

At first glance Solon's declaration, 'As I grow older I keep on learning many things' (γῆράσκω δ' αἰεὶ πολλὰ διδασκόμενος, fr. 18 West) might appear to

⁸ Lysgaard Lech (2009) 352–361. For additional criticism of Winkler's arguments, see Csapo/Slater (1994) 352.

⁹ For an additional dimension of time in tragedy—uncompleted versus completed action—see Hutchinson (1999).

¹⁰ E.g. by Altmeyer (2001).

¹¹ Sallares (1991) 164–192. He points out (p. 165) that initiation is 'merely one possible expression of age as a principle of social organization'.

¹² Davidson (2006) 55.

¹³ Davidson (2006) 36. For a somewhat schematic survey of young and old in the three Attic dramatists, see de Romilly (1968) 143–170.

sum up ancient attitudes toward education. Often quoted in antiquity,¹⁴ the statement holds appeal for moderns as well, for its affirmation of lifelong learning harmonizes with contemporary theories of human development.

It is important to recognize, however, that Solon's dictum registers at best a minority view.¹⁵ The Athenian statesman, an innovator in so many respects,¹⁶ here goes against the grain of his tradition in two ways. First, he disregards the archaic ambivalence toward learning. Archaic literature describes two kinds of learning, one regarded positively and the other negatively. *Promêthia* or forethought is commended. An individual who takes the measure of a situation in advance (either by heeding sensible advice or by drawing lessons from the mistakes of others) will avoid the painful retrospective education that is encapsulated in Hesiod's proverbial παθὼν δέ τε νήπιος ἔγνω, 'through suffering the feckless man comes to recognition' (*Op.* 218). Πάσχω, the verb from which the participle παθὼν is derived, denotes either 'experience' or 'suffer'; here the substantive νήπιος imposes the latter meaning. The connotations of νήπιος are sufficiently complex to make translation a challenge; though the term is often rendered as 'childish', 'feckless' (with its dual sense of 'irresponsible' and 'ineffective') is more accurate. As Edmunds explains, 'adults who are called *nēpioi* ... are disconnected from the past and, especially, the future ... [T]his disconnection is both mental (they do not have foresight) and social (their lack of foresight almost always has fatal consequences)'.¹⁷ Hesiod's maxim appears in variant form ('once a thing has been done, the νήπιος recognizes it') in Homer.¹⁸ In both poems the context suggests unequivocal disapproval of belated learning.

Solon goes against the grain of his tradition in another way when he associates advanced years with receiving rather than giving instruction. Nestor, the elder statesman among the Greek warriors at Troy, expresses the normative view when he says that it is the 'privilege of old men' (γέρας γερόντων, *Il.* 4.323) to offer verbal counsel to the younger warriors. This privilege offers partial compensation for the loss of physical strength that is

¹⁴ E.g. by Plato, *Lach.* 188b and 189a, *Resp.* 536d, and Plut. *Sol.* 2.2. For additional references, see West (1972) (I) ad loc.

¹⁵ For the novelty of the sentiment, see Schadewaldt (1960) 127.

¹⁶ See Ober (2006) 455 on Solon as 'an ethical and political reformer', and Irwin (2006) on Solon as an anomaly among the elegists.

¹⁷ Edmunds (1990) 60.

¹⁸ ῥεχθέν δέ τε νήπιος ἔγνω, *Il.* 17.32 and 20.198. As Verdenius (1985) explains (*ad Op.* 218) in the Homeric variations 'the idea of suffering is expressed in the form of a warning preceding the proverb', i.e. in πρὶν τι κακὸν παθεῖν, which occupies the first half of both hexameters.

regularly lamented in archaic poetry.¹⁹ The notion of a division of labour based on age, whereby the young do the fighting and their elders do the talking,²⁰ is implicit in the qualified praise that Nestor offers Diomedes in *Iliad* 9. The young man, he says, is ‘outstanding in battle, and best in counsel among all [his] age mates’ (μετὰ πάντας ὁμήλικας, *Il.* 9.54) but since he is still young he ‘hasn’t come to the completion of words’ (*Il.* 9.56); that is, he has failed to address all aspects of the situation. Similar assumptions underlie a later passage also involving Diomedes. After Agamemnon advocates abandoning the siege of Troy, he invites anyone ‘whether young or old’ who has a better idea to express his opinion. Diomedes, the only warrior to respond, prefaces his speech with a *captatio benevolentiae*: he hopes the Greeks will be willing to listen, and won’t be astonished or annoyed because he is the youngest among them (*Il.* 14.111–112).

Elders enjoy a privileged relationship to time, for they can ‘see simultaneously behind and in front’ (*Il.* 3.109)—that is, they can use their knowledge of the past to surmise the future. Accordingly, their instruction often takes the form of *paraineseis*, injunctions or general reflections that are honed by tradition or at least traditional in form, and *paradeigmata*, exemplary tales drawn from the past.²¹ The dispenser of instruction may or may not be a blood relative: in the *Iliad* Achilles is the recipient of advice from his father Peleus in the form of injunctions, as well as advice from his tutor Phoenix in the form of an exemplary tale.²² Regardless of biological connection, in the archaic literary tradition the didactic relationship is often conflated with the parental one. Good counsel emanating from other sources can be described as fatherly.²³ The deference that fathers expected from their sons is also transferred to the didactic relationship: archaic *paraineseis* and *paradeigmata* assume that it is incumbent on elders to offer advice, and incumbent on the young to listen and learn.²⁴

Classical tragedy follows archaic precedent in its representation of paternal counsel. Thus Oedipus, bidding farewell to his young daughters, tells

¹⁹ For a catalogue of the symptoms of old age in archaic poetry, see Preisshofen (1997) 111–114.

²⁰ Cf. also Hes. fr. 321 M-W.

²¹ On injunctions and general reflections, see Kurke (1990); Lardinois (1995); and Cuny (2007). On exemplary tales, see Willcock (1964) and Held (1987).

²² Injunctions: *Il.* 11.784 (= 6. 208, spoken by another father to his son), *Il.* 9. 254–256. Exemplary tale: *Il.* 9. 529–605.

²³ Cf. *Od.* 1.307–308.

²⁴ Cf. Thgn. 1049–1050 and Solon fr. 22a West.

them that if only they were old enough he would give them many injunctions (πόλλ' ἂν παρήγουν, *OT* 1512). Tragedy also continues to depict instruction as originating with the old and directed at the young. 'You are young', says the unknown speaker of a Sophoclean fragment (694 Radt), 'you have much to learn and much to listen to and need long schooling'. Adults tend to regard themselves as beyond instruction: 'I think you are a fool', says Sophocles' Ajax to Tecmessa, 'if you mean now to educate my character' (*Aj.* 594–595). But Solon's unorthodox viewpoint also has its adherents.²⁵ The old men who constitute the Chorus of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* declare, 'For the old, there is always [sufficient] youth to learn well' (*Ag.* 584), and the unknown speaker of an Aeschylean fragment (396 Radt) asserts, 'It is fine even for an old man to learn what is wise'. Like Diomedes in the *Iliad*, Antigone in *Oedipus at Colonus* prefaces her advice with a disarming acknowledgement of her youth: 'Father, obey me, even if I am young to offer counsel' (καί νέα παρανέσω, *OC* 1181). The defensive tone of these passages may reflect anxiety that the traditional hierarchical relationship between the generations was in peril.²⁶ In the last quarter of the century Aristophanes inverted this relationship for comic effect. In *Wasps* the youthful Bdelycleon describes himself as an instructor who will teach his father the error of his ways (ἀναδιδάξειν οἷομαί σ' ὥς πάντα ταῦτα ἁμαρτάνεις, *Vesp.* 514). In *Clouds* the adolescent Pheidippides not only trounces his father verbally but also gives him a beating, albeit (as he explains) with benign intent (*Nub.* 1409–1414).

The conventions that Aristophanes exploits for their comic potential were apparently of serious concern to Sophocles, who explores them at length in three plays. The third episode of *Antigone* stages a confrontation between Creon and his son Haemon. Having condemned Haemon's fiancée Antigone to death, Creon expects his son to be angry, but Haemon's opening words ('Father, I am yours', 635) breathe devotion and respect. The gratified father responds with a speech in praise of 'obedient offspring' (γονάς/κατηχόους, 641–642) and tractable subjects, which abounds in general reflections of a didactic nature.²⁷ Creon also orders Haemon to 'spit out' his intended bride, and leave her to find a bridegroom in Hades (653–654).

Haemon does not openly contest his father's directives. Instead he suggests that the gods 'implant judgment' (φύουσιν ... φρένας, 683) in human

²⁵ See Garvie (1986) *ad Cho.* 171.

²⁶ See Strauss (1993) 130–178.

²⁷ For analysis of the speech, see Cuny (2007) 294–296.

beings; that is, judgment is inborn rather than developing with age.²⁸ He reports that the citizens of Thebes are lamenting Antigone's punishment among themselves and praising her brave deed, and he urges his father to pay heed to others' opinions: 'It is not shameful for a man, even if he is wise, often to learn things and not to resist too much' (710–711). Haemon amplifies this general reflection by means of two cautionary examples (712–717), one drawn from nature and the other from the realm of practical skill: trees that bend their branches in a flood survive whereas rigid ones are destroyed, and the sailor who refuses to slacken his sails in a storm will come to grief. By using such analogies to drive his point home, Haemon assumes an instructional tone.²⁹

After making the claim that judgment does not depend on age and immediately putting this claim to the test, Haemon closes his speech in a manner intended to mollify his father. He acknowledges his youth and gives a nod to archaic wisdom: 'No, retreat from your anger and allow yourself to change; for if I too, young as I am, have some judgment, I say that it is best by far if a man is altogether full of knowledge; but that, since things are not accustomed to go that way, it is also good to learn from those who give good counsel' (718–723). Haemon here combines a strategic *captatio benevolentiae* with paraphrase of a Hesiodic passage (*Op.* 293–297) that divides men into three categories: the man who knows everything himself, the man who heeds good advice from others, and (although Haemon 'tactfully omits'³⁰ this last type) the man who neither knows anything himself nor heeds anybody else. He is giving his father the opportunity to demonstrate that he belongs to the second category.

Creon ignores Haemon's message to attack the messenger. Falling back on the *topos* of the wise old and the foolish young, Creon demands angrily (726–727): 'So men of my age are to be taught sense by a man of your age?'³¹ Haemon explains that he is not suggesting that Creon heed any and all advice but only *just* advice, which does not depend on the age of the giver: 'Nothing but what is right! If I am young, one must not consider my age rather than my merits' (728–729). The ensuing dialogue turns on whether Creon's words and actions are authoritative or merely authoritarian. His dogmatism manifests itself not only in his beliefs about age versus youth,

²⁸ Cuny (2007) 99.

²⁹ Cf. *Aj.* 669–677, *Ant.* 473–478, and *OC* 607–615.

³⁰ Cropp (1997) 142.

³¹ Cf. Thgn. 578: 'Don't try to instruct me, for I am not of an age to learn'.

but also in his assumptions about male versus female: he is determined not to be bested by a woman (680; cf. 484–485, 525) and accuses his son of being Antigone's ally (740) and slave (756). As Creon becomes increasingly belligerent, Haemon suggests that it is his father who lacks maturity (735). By the end of the scene Creon has provoked him to rage, and he exits with the threat that his father will never set eyes on him again (763–764). In fact the two encounter each other once more inside Antigone's tomb, at which point Haemon 'spits on' the father who had advised him to 'spit out' his bride (1232; cf. 653), attempts to run him through with a sword, and finally turns the weapon on himself, in this way fulfilling Creon's wish that Antigone should find a bridegroom in Hades. The family misfortunes do not end there, for on learning of Haemon's suicide his mother Eurydice kills herself in turn. Although no speaker in the play passes judgment on the quarrel between father and son, the outcome intimates that Haemon was in the right: good advice can indeed issue from the young, and it behooves the old to be receptive.

Sophocles stages a second confrontation between father and son in the *exodos* of *Trachiniae*; this one, however, has a different result. At the outset Heracles, in agony from the poisoned robe sent him by his wife Deianeira, directs a series of non-negotiable demands at his son Hyllus. First he orders the young man to dispatch him with a sword blow (1035), then to hand Deianeira over to him for punishment (1064–1069); just as Haemon was expected to side with his father over his bride, Hyllus is expected to side with his father over his mother. Like Haemon, Hyllus evades this father's commands by changing the subject. He informs Heracles that Deianeira has committed suicide in despair over what was in fact an innocent mistake: she believed she was infusing the robe with a love-philtre, not poison. Heracles does not respond to these revelations insofar as they concern his wife; instead he seizes on the connection between Hyllus' story and previous prophecies concerning his own death. It is this death that now occupies his attention. The exchange that follows features three iterations of paternal demand, filial response, and resolution.

Heracles' concept of paternal authority is identical to Creon's. He begins by articulating 'the noblest of laws that bids a man obey his father' (νόμον/ κάλλιστον ... πειθαρχεῖν πατρί, 1177–1178; cf. *Ant.* 639–640). Not content to invoke this law, he demands additional pledges: a solemn handclasp, an oath by Zeus. Only after the son has bound himself to obedience does the father reveal the tasks he has in mind: Hyllus is to transport Heracles to Mount Oeta, construct a pyre, set it alight, and burn him alive. Moreover, Hyllus is to accomplish these tasks in his father's spirit, 'without mourning

and without weeping' (1200); Heracles threatens him with a father's curse if he does not comply.³² Yet when Hyllus protests in horror, Heracles gives ground (1211). Father and son reach a compromise. Hyllus will neither be forced to burn his father alive nor to light the pyre—the most shocking and most polluting of Heracles' demands—but he will obey his father's remaining orders, and this limited compliance will suffice (ἀλλ' ἀρκέσει καὶ ταῦτα, 1216).

Having accepted this compromise, Heracles next requests an additional 'small favour' (1217). Again Hyllus promises compliance without knowing what task he is being asked to perform, and again he is appalled by his father's demand: Hyllus is to marry Iole, the captive woman who was the innocent cause of Heracles' travail and Deianeira's suicide. This time Heracles remains firm in face of Hyllus' protests. Although Hyllus finds nothing to commend in this demand, he concludes that his father's orders both require and justify his obedience.

Heracles' third demand, again presented as a 'favour' (1252), is that Hyllus transport him to Mount Oeta as quickly as possible; to this Hyllus agrees without demur. Both the scene and the play thus end on a note of acquiescence, but in actuality father and son have arrived at a draw. Although Heracles gets his way in many respects, Hyllus wrests important concessions from him. As his life draws to an end Heracles demands dispassionate endurance of himself (1259–1263), but he no longer imposes the same requirement on his son. Hyllus, now free to express his own perspective, closes the play by deploring the gods' unkindness (ἀγνωμοσύνη, 1266) and attributing all of his family's disasters to Zeus.³³ Despite Sophocles' well-attested personal piety, some of his characters voice religious opinions as daring as anything to be found in Euripides.³⁴

A final variation on the father-son relationship appears in *Philoctetes*. The opening of the play finds Odysseus and Neoptolemus staking out the cave on the deserted island of Lemnos that has been Philoctetes' home for nine years. Odysseus has a plan for beguiling Philoctetes, but before revealing what he has in mind he stresses to Neoptolemus the need for unconditional obedience (50–53):

³² On the power of a parent's curse, see Gregory (2009) 41–43.

³³ The attribution of the final lines is contested. Easterling (1981) 70 favours the Chorus as speaker. Lloyd-Jones/Wilson (1990) and Davies (1991) give the lines to Hyllus. Jouanna (2007) 464 interprets them as the Chorus' refutation of Hyllus.

³⁴ Cf. *OT* 723–725, *Phil.* 446–452. For challenges to the gods in Euripides, see Dale (1963) 212–213. For the contrast between Sophocles' life and his work, see Schadewaldt (1960) 388.

Ἀχιλλέως παῖ, δεῖ σ' ἐφ' οἷς ἐλήλυθας
 γενναῖον εἶναι, μὴ μόνον τῷ σώματι,
 ἀλλ' ἦν τι καίνον, ὧν πρὶν οὐκ ἀκήκοας,
 κλύης, ὑπουργεῖν, ὡς ὑπηρέτης πάρει.

Son of Achilles, the mission you have come on demands that you show your nobility; not only with your body, but if you are told something new, such as you have not heard earlier, you must give your help, since you are here to help me.

What is the nature of the obligation that Odysseus emphasizes at the beginning and the end of this speech?³⁵ Neoptolemus is not required to obey the older man as a matter of military discipline, for he has joined the expedition of his own free will.³⁶ To ensure the young man's compliance Odysseus therefore assimilates himself to an authoritarian father on the model of Creon or Heracles. One scholar notes that 'the relationships between Neoptolemus and the other older participants recall those of fathers and sons' and describes the play's action as a 'struggle between Philoctetes and Odysseus over the paternity of Neoptolemus'.³⁷ This characterization is not exact, for Philoctetes and Odysseus differ in the methods they employ to influence Neoptolemus. Whereas Philoctetes relies on supplication, pleas, and persuasion, Odysseus adopts a commanding tone that brooks no dissent.

Neoptolemus' response to his surrogate father's demands is complex and evolving. Initially he accepts the role of dutiful son, asking Odysseus, 'What are your orders?' (54). But after the older man has explained the deception he wishes him to practice on Philoctetes, Neoptolemus objects that 'it is my nature to do nothing by treacherous plotting; that is my nature, and it was also, as they say, my father's nature' (88–89). Odysseus counters Neoptolemus' scruples by suggesting first that his resistance is based on a characteristically youthful aptitude for deeds over words (96–99) and secondly that the ends will justify the means: deceiving Philoctetes will enhance Neoptolemus' own honour and reputation (111, 117, 119). Neoptolemus allows himself to be persuaded, but his change of heart does not last; he is increasingly troubled by pity for Philoctetes. In the third episode Odysseus is still able to control Neoptolemus by direct commands (cf. 1068–1069), but by the *exodos* the young man has come to regret his obedience (1226), defy his surrogate

³⁵ For claims of necessity in *Philoctetes*, see Schein (1998) 301–305.

³⁶ Cf. *Phil.* 58–59, 382–383. That Neoptolemus is free to remain at Troy or depart for home is one of several true details incorporated into the fictitious story Neoptolemus tells Philoctetes.

³⁷ Roisman (1997) 128.

father (1253), and meet Odysseus' threat of force with an answering threat (1255–1256). In the face of Neoptolemus' resistance Odysseus beats a strategic retreat (1257); the resulting impasse can be resolved only by the *deus ex machina* Heracles.

In all three Sophoclean plays featuring fathers and sons, whether biological or surrogate, the young man sooner or later begins to think for himself, and departs from his traditional stance of deferential obedience. Furthermore, in each instance the trend of the action suggests that the defiant son is wiser than the authoritarian father and the one with right on his side. In representing generational conflict, Sophoclean tragedy tilts toward youth.

3. *Natural Endowment and Acculturation*

As we have seen, the archaic tradition commends the learning that comes from heeding advice and depreciates the learning that comes from painful experience. Hesiod associates the first kind with the figure of Prometheus, whose name was derived in antiquity from *promêthia* or 'forethought'.³⁸ He associates the second kind with Epimetheus, 'afterthought', who accepted Pandora into his household even though his brother Prometheus warned him against accepting any gift from Zeus, and who only 'realized the evil he had once he had it' (*Op.* 89). Without suggesting that forethought like Prometheus' guarantees freedom from suffering,³⁹ the archaic tradition leaves no doubt that unwariness like Epimetheus' is a prescription for disaster.

By figuring Prometheus and Epimetheus as brothers Hesiod encourages his audience to contemplate their similarities and differences. Since the two had the same parents⁴⁰ and, presumably, the same upbringing, their divergent intellectual styles must depend on innate disposition. The pair thus serve to direct attention not only to the contrast between forethought and afterthought but also to a second concept subtending archaic views of education: the opposition between *phusis* and *nomos*, natural endowment and acculturation. Although Hesiod does not comment explicitly on this polarity, other archaic poets express strong opinions. According to Theognis, 'It's easier to beget and rear a man than put/good sense in him. No one

³⁸ See West (1966) *ad* Hes. *Theog.* 510. For Epimetheus as ἐψίνοος ('late-thinking'), see Pind. *Pyth.* 5.28.

³⁹ *Contra* Dörrie (1956) 319.

⁴⁰ Their parents are Iapetos and Klymene (Hes. *Theog.* 507–508).

has yet devised/a way to make a fool wise, or a bad man good' (Thgn. 429–432, transl. West 1993). For Pindar, 'A person with inborn glory exerts great weight, but one with [only] learning at his disposal is a shadow of a man, panting now in this direction, now in that ...' (*Nem.* 3. 40–42, transl. Race 1997). Both poets articulate the aristocratic view that education is powerless to alter essential character.

The sophists, who collectively constitute the intellectual avant-garde of the fifth century, revisit the relationship between *phusis* and *nomos*. The anonymous author of the *Dissoi Logoi* dismisses 'the argument, neither true nor new ... that wisdom and virtue can be neither taught nor learned' (6.1, transl. Sprague 1968). Moving beyond the binary of natural endowment and acculturation, the sophists emphasize the critical role played by training. Critias, for example, declares (DK 9): 'More men are good as a result of practice than from nature'. Yet their modifications to the traditional view of education do not constitute a radical shift. They propose to supplement *phusis* by instruction, not supplant it, and they emphasize that in order to succeed, instruction must begin early in life. According to Protagoras, 'teaching requires natural endowment and practice' and 'children need to learn beginning at an early age' (DK 3).

In formulations like these the opposition between *phusis* and *nomos* begins to blur. The two draw together in the sophist Prodicus' allegorical account of the Choice of Heracles. Although Prodicus' own version does not survive, Xenophon provides a paraphrase. The youthful Heracles arrives at a crossroads where he encounters two personified female figures, one representing Virtue and the other Vice. As Virtue (*Aretê*) invites Heracles to choose her as his guide, she says that she has singled him out because she knows his parents and is familiar with his '*phusis* in [his] education'.⁴¹ Education, this phrase implies, makes manifest and develops latent natural qualities. As Democritus puts it (DK 33), 'Instruction and nature are similar. For instruction changes the tenor of a person and in so doing creates his *phusis*'. For Democritus, early instruction becomes internalized and sets the direction for future development. It is thus virtually indistinguishable from *phusis*.

Where does Sophoclean tragedy stand on *phusis* and *nomos*? No more than the other tragedians does Sophocles shy away from anachronism;⁴² his characters make transparent allusions to the fifth-century debate, as when

⁴¹ τῇ φύσιν τῇ σὺν ἐν τῇ παιδείᾳ, *Mem.* 2.1.26. For discussion, see Rose (1992) 312.

⁴² See Easterling (1985).

the aged Oedipus castigates his sons for adhering to Egyptian customs (τοῖς ἐν Αἰγύπτου νόμοις, *OC* 337) in their nature and manner of life (φύσιν καὶ βίου τροφάς, *OC* 338). The traditional aristocratic viewpoint is well represented by Sophoclean speakers. A fragment from *Tereus* (808 Radt) declares that 'what nature gives to a man you can never take away'. Ajax opines that the small Eurysaces 'will not be frightened to look on ... newly spilt blood, if he is truly my son' (*Aj.* 545–546). The Chorus-leader of *Antigone* comments that Antigone has inherited her father's savage nature (*Ant.* 471–472), and Creon describes her as 'born senseless' (*Ant.* 562). Electra explains to her sister Chrysothemis that at the time their father was murdered 'by nature I was the same, but then I had less understanding' (*El.* 1023). Although each of these speakers regards inherited *phusis* as decisive in determining character, we need not assume that Sophocles shared this belief.

To even begin to approach Sophocles' own views on *nomos* and *phusis* we must consider not isolated passages drawn from the plays and fragments, but the entire play that Sophocles devotes to the issue. As we have seen, in *Philoctetes* Neoptolemus objects to Odysseus' deceptive plot as contrary to his own nature. Philoctetes corroborates his interpretation when he attributes the young man's misdeeds to the teachings of evil men (*Phil.* 971–972; cf. 1013–1015) and describes Neoptolemus' ultimate change of heart as proof that his Achillean heritage has reasserted itself: 'You showed the nature, my son, of the stock you come from, having not Sisyphus for father, but Achilles'.⁴³ But is Philoctetes' assessment accurate? Does the play portray a Neoptolemus who reverts to his paternal *phusis*, and does it thus constitute 'a purposeful reaffirmation of the aristocratic tradition'?⁴⁴ Since Neoptolemus has never known his father, his pronouncements about Achilles' nature (and by extension his own) reflect not untutored instinct but rather what he has been told and taught. In fact his ultimate choices differ significantly from his father's.⁴⁵ At the opening of the play Neoptolemus is an untried youth. He receives instruction first from Odysseus, then from Philoctetes; although he eventually opts for the values represented and advocated by Philoctetes, '[t]here is nothing automatic or inevitable about the emergence of his good *phusis*'.⁴⁶ To adopt Democritus' formulation,

⁴³ *Phil.* 1310–1312. 'Sisyphus' is here metonymy for 'Odysseus': Philoctetes uses a variant genealogy hostile to Odysseus to make him Sisyphus' son rather than Laertes', as in Homer.

⁴⁴ De Romilly (1995) 173.

⁴⁵ Blundell (1989a) 143–144.

⁴⁶ Rose (1992) 313.

the young man's *phusis* becomes manifest through his *paideia*. It is impossible to separate the two.

Sophocles forwards sophistic views of nature and acculturation not only in the late *Philoctetes* but also in the much earlier *Ajax*. Even as Ajax insists to Tecmessa that their son Eurysaces will manifest his paternal heritage by not shrinking from the sight of blood, he adds, 'You must begin now to break him in by his father's harsh rules (*nomois*) and make his nature (*phusin*) like mine' (545–549). Like Protagoras, Ajax recognizes the importance of early instruction in shaping the *phusis*, and like Democritus he sees nature and instruction as inseparable.

Another Sophoclean device for framing the relationship between *phusis* and *nomos* takes its inspiration from Hesiod. Two of the extant plays depict a pair of siblings who, like Prometheus and Epimetheus, respond in opposite ways to the same situation. In Sophocles' innovative representation, however, the more provident sibling is the one found wanting.

In the prologue of *Antigone* the motifs of *phusis* and forethought converge. Before Antigone invites her sister Ismene to join her in burying their dead brother Polyneices, she warns her that the penalty is death by stoning at the hands of the citizens (36) and suggests that Ismene's decision will reveal whether she is noble by nature or degenerate (38). Demurring, Ismene urges her sister to take circumstances and consequences into account. She begs Antigone to recognize their situation: their entire family has perished, leaving them without protectors; they are women, ill equipped to resist men; they are helpless against the ruler.⁴⁷ She ends her speech in traditional didactic vein with a general reflection: '[T]here is no sense in actions that exceed our powers' (67–68). Antigone's response shows that she understands the consequences of burying her brother, but rejects the prudent in favour of the honourable choice. Her decision stems not from ignorance of the consequences or lack of forethought, but from resolve; at this point she positively welcomes the predictable consequence of her disobedience (73–75). For Ismene, in contrast, political defiance is not an option: she tells her sister that she is by nature powerless (*ἐφ' ἑνὶ ἀμήχανος*, 79) to disobey.

The exchanges between Electra and her sister Chrysothemis in *Electra* bring the same contrasts to the fore. Like Ismene, Chrysothemis assumes a didactic tone, urging her sister to 'think sensibly' (394) and not 'come to

⁴⁷ Cf. 49, 58, 61, and Cropp (1997) 143–147 on the intellectual vocabulary deployed throughout the play.

grief through foolishness' (398). Like Ismene she reminds her sister that as women they are possessed of limited strength (997–998) and urges her to yield to those in power (1014; the Chorus-leader in response commends the *πρόνοια* or 'foresight' of her remarks). The language of teaching and learning figures explicitly in their dialogue: Chrysothemis asks whether Antigone is unwilling to be taught after all this time (*ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ διδασχθήναι*, 330) not to gratify her anger. Subsequently Electra turns her sister's vocabulary against her, telling Chrysothemis not to 'teach' her disloyalty to her dear ones (395); Chrysothemis retorts that what she is rather attempting to teach her is deference to the powerful. Thereupon Electra replies contemptuously, 'That kind of subservience is for you! What you suggest is not my way!' (397). Nature, Electra implies, has constituted the two sisters differently; there is no common ground. Like Antigone, Electra understands the consequences of her defiance ('I shall come to grief, if I must', 399); she makes her choice in full knowledge and without hesitation.⁴⁸

Sophocles employs a variety of devices to explore the relationship of *phusis* and *nomos*. He scatters references to the polarity throughout his plays; he devotes one tragedy, *Philoctetes*, to a young man's moral education; twice he directs attention to the issue by appropriating Hesiod's device of contrasting siblings. Different plays point to different conclusions. Neoptolemus' evolution suggests that it is not *phusis* alone but a combination of *phusis* and acculturation that defines character. While *phusis* does account for the differences between the sisters in *Antigone* and *Electra*, those plays offer an innovative evaluation of *promêthia*. The audience cannot refrain from measuring Antigone against Ismene and Electra against Chrysothemis, and the comparison suggests that forethought does not have the same value it did for Hesiod. In Sophoclean tragedy it is trumped by other qualities: idealism, courage, resolve.⁴⁹

4. Theories of Cultural Development

As Sophocles explores notions of teaching and learning in relation to age-class systems and to the *phusis/nomos* polarity, he uses the multiple voices available to him as a dramatist to present innovative alongside traditional

⁴⁸ For further comparison of Electra and Chrysothemis, see Saïd (1993) 320–322.

⁴⁹ Sourvinou-Inwood (1989) argues that contemporary spectators would have judged Antigone in the wrong, in effect siding with Ismene, but her demonstration involves considerable special pleading.

views. When it comes to theories of cultural development, he achieves the same effect by having his Chorus execute an abrupt change of attitude within a single ode. Where archaic literature offers both negative and positive perspectives and fifth-century philosophers and poets promote an optimistic view, the Chorus of *Antigone* shifts between one word and the next from generous praise of human intellectual achievements to stern and wary admonition.

The most elaborate archaic account of cultural development is Hesiod's. Hesiod blends prior traditions to imagine time as ultimately cyclical, but involving a trend toward deterioration in the short term from one generation to another.⁵⁰ To help differentiate the different generations Hesiod rings changes on the familiar life-stages. Old age and physical decline are unknown to the tranquil men of the first, golden generation; when they die, it is like falling asleep (*Op.* 113–116). The succeeding silver race is characterized both as less pious and as 'greatly νήπιος' (131): these men experience a childhood lasting a hundred years, then a brief adolescence followed immediately by death. The bronze men presumably die young, for their lives are marked by violence. The age of heroes that follows brings a temporary improvement in moral quality, but like the bronze men the heroes die young in battle. The pattern of moral deterioration reasserts itself with the iron generation, Hesiod's contemporaries. Bad as this race is now, worse is to come: Zeus will destroy these men, Hesiod predicts, when babies are born already grey-haired (180–181). Though bearing this external sign of wisdom, the iron men will flout divinely sanctioned customs such as guest-friendship and reverence for parents (185); the last gods will withdraw from the earth, leaving nothing but pain and grief behind (197–201). This framework leaves no room for positive development fostered by education.

Hesiod's is not the only archaic account, however, of change over time. A fragment of the pre-Socratic philosopher Xenophanes declares, 'The gods did not reveal all things to men from the beginning, but by searching men found in time what is better'.⁵¹ While the fragment lacks a context, there seems little doubt that it is indirectly aimed at Hesiod.⁵² Rather than receiving everything from the gods in the beginning, as in Hesiod's account, human beings make their own gradual discoveries, and the results are better

⁵⁰ See West (1978) *ad Op.* 106–201.

⁵¹ DK 18. For discussion, see Tulin (1993).

⁵² Cf. DK 11, where Xenophanes directly attacks Hesiod and Homer for representing the gods with human faults.

rather than worse. Among the fifth-century sophists this 'anti-primitive'⁵³ perspective carries the day. For example, the account that Plato plausibly attributes to Protagoras singles out the art of civic life (πολιτική τέχνη, *Prt.* 322b) as crucial in freeing human existence from destitution and chaos. This account appears to have influenced Sophocles, as we shall see.

The *topos* of cultural development also appears in tragedy. The author of *Prometheus Bound* puts into the mouth of Prometheus a rhetorical display-speech recounting how he 'made human beings, feckless as they were (νηπιούς ὄντας), sensible and possessed of reason' (*PV* 443–444). Previously human beings had lived at random, but the Titan's intellectual and technological instruction gave them purpose. The speech concludes, 'All human arts come from Prometheus' (*PV* 506)—that is, both from the Titan and from forethought.⁵⁴ With Prometheus' intervention time no longer brings deterioration, and προμηθία can be deployed to ameliorate the conditions of life as well as to avoid disaster.

The first *stasimon* of *Antigone* takes up the same theme, but unlike the *Prometheus* version it makes no mention of a divine benefactor.⁵⁵ Sophocles' emphasis falls on man himself, whose ability to better his situation makes him a creature both 'wonderful' and 'terrible'.⁵⁶ Most of the *stasimon* is given over to an admiring account of the creative and entrepreneurial spirit of human beings. Man, the members of the Chorus explain, has conquered nature, traversing the ocean in ships and cultivating the earth with his plough. He has hunted birds, beasts, and fish for food, and domesticated wild animals. He has taught himself speech, rapid thought, and a civic disposition (φθέγμα καὶ ἀνεμόεν φρόνημα καὶ ἀστυνόμους/ ὀργὰς ἐδιδάξατο, *Ant.* 355–356; the last item strongly recalls Protagoras⁵⁷). He has devised shelter against the elements. He 'meets nothing in the future without resource' (360); though unable to escape death, he has contrived remedies for disease.

To this point the singers have offered only praise of the intellectual discoveries that have enabled improvement over time. The end of the ode, however, brings an abrupt shift in tone. The singers note that mortal

⁵³ For the term, see Lovejoy/Boas (1935) 192–196.

⁵⁴ *PV* 506. For the verbal play, see Griffith (1983) ad loc.

⁵⁵ Sophocles is unique among the three tragedians in this respect. Euripides' account of cultural development also credits one of the gods with regulating life for mankind (*Supp.* 201–202).

⁵⁶ For the multivalence of δεινός, the adjective that opens the ode, see Griffith (1999) ad *Ant.* 222.

⁵⁷ Burton (1980) 100–101.

initiatives can have bad outcomes as well as good, insist that the man who is 'high in the city' (ὕψιπολις, 370, with another Protagorean echo) will observe the laws both human and divine, and emphatically disassociate themselves from anyone who is 'outcast from the city' (ἄπολις, 370; the adjective is placed immediately after ὕψιπολις for maximum contrast). At this point the individual they presumably have in mind is the unknown criminal who has given Polyneices burial in violation of Creon's orders. In retrospect, however, the ode's reference point will shift, for as both Antigone (450–455) and Teiresias (1064–1073) explain, it is in fact Creon who transgresses the divine order and ultimately pays a fearful penalty.

The first *stasimon* of *Antigone* is unique among fifth-century Greek texts that bear on cultural development in combining praise for man's self-taught inventiveness—a stance that reflects the progressive attitude associated with the sophists—with a traditional warning against impiety and transgression. This unapologetic juxtaposition of new and old can by now be recognized as characteristic of Sophocles.

5. *Suffering and Learning*

In the fifth century the concept of learning through suffering, first articulated by Hesiod and Homer, acquires a new, pithy formulation and with it the potential for an altered significance. In Aeschylus' *Oresteia* the maxim appears as *πάθει μάθος*, 'in *pathos* there is learning'.⁵⁸ With the disappearance of the pejorative *νήπιος*, it becomes possible to understand the noun *πάθος* (from *πάσχω*) neutrally as 'experience', not just negatively as 'suffering'. There are some signs of this reshaping in the *Oresteia*. In the *parodos* of *Agamemnon* the Chorus explains *πάθει μάθος* as a law set in place by Zeus whereby mortals acquire good sense even against their will. Here the maxim recalls the traditional Hesiodic principle of painful retrospective learning.⁵⁹ But as the trilogy follows the crimes and punishments of successive generations of Atreids, it charts an evolution in the understanding and administration of justice; concomitant with this evolution, the understanding of *πάθει μάθος* appears to evolve as well. At the end of the final play the Chorus of Furies, now reconciled to an outcome (Orestes' acquittal) which they had previously opposed, praise the Athenians for 'acquiring good sense

⁵⁸ *Ag.* 177; cf. *Ag.* 250. For discussion of text and context, see Bollack/Judet de la Combe (1981) ad loc.

⁵⁹ For the association with Hesiod, see Lloyd-Jones (1956) 62.

through time' (*Eum.* 1000). They echo the Chorus' earlier phraseology while transforming its sense: the Furies now suggest that *πάθει μάθος* describes a positive development, and that human beings can use their experience to acquire a wisdom that 'they have not always possessed'.⁶⁰

Other Aeschylean passages, however, show that the traditional, negative sense of 'learning through suffering' continues in force. In Aeschylean theatre the context is often secular: it is the weak rather than the feckless who are menaced with harsh lessons emanating not from the gods but from powerful mortals. Thus at the end of *Agamemnon* Clytaemestra sardonically invokes the concept of learning through suffering as she threatens the old men of the Chorus with punishment for their defiance: 'You will learn good sense through being taught, though the lesson comes late' (*γνώσῃ διδαχθεὶς ὀψὲ γούν τὸ σωφρονεῖν*, *Ag.* 1425; cf. *Ag.* 1619). They will realize their mistake only when it is too late to rectify it; moreover, they will learn their lesson in old age, a time of life more suitable for instruction than for learning.

Sophoclean tragedy retains previous uses of *πάθει μάθος* while adding a significant new dimension. Like Aeschylus, Sophocles uses the notion of *ὀψιμαθία* or late learning in a double sense.⁶¹ When Creon forbids the burial of Polyneices' corpse while 'lodging a living person [Antigone] in a tomb' (*Ant.* 1069), he fails to foresee the consequences of this reversal. His change of course does not come in time to prevent disaster; when Creon laments the 'errors of [his] stubborn mind' (1261), the Chorus responds, 'Alas, you seem to have seen justice only late!' (*οἴμ' ὥς ἔοικας ὀψὲ τὴν δίκην ἰδεῖν*, 1270). All Creon can take away from the deaths of his son and of his wife is the belated understanding that comes both after the fact and to a man advanced in years.

Sophocles also follows Aeschylus in adapting *πάθει μάθος* to a secular context. His powerful figures are eager to teach the weak a lesson through the exercise of force. When in *Oedipus Tyrannus* Oedipus suspects Creon of plotting against him, he tells his brother-in-law that his age is all that saves him: 'If you did not seem to be old, you would learn by suffering how dangerous are your thoughts' (*OT* 402–403). Creon in *Antigone* comments that Antigone 'will learn, at that late stage [i.e. when she is imprisoned in her tomb] that it is wasted effort to show regard for things in Hades' (*Ant.* 779–780). 'Learning' as employed by these speakers is a grim euphemism for the mental aspect of physical suffering.

⁶⁰ Dodds (1973) 54.

⁶¹ On *ὀψιμαθία*, see Whitman (1951) 104–105; Knox (1964) 25–26; and Rutherford (1982) 149–150.

In Sophoclean tragedy, suffering comes not only to feckless types like the Creon of *Antigone*, but to clever, disciplined, provident human beings like Deianeira and Oedipus.⁶² Sophocles holds out little hope that the sufferers themselves can derive any benefit from their anguish; in this respect he is as pessimistic as the archaic poets.⁶³ Nonetheless, he offers a different opportunity both to the characters in his plays and to the watching audience: the chance to learn something from others' misfortunes. What they can learn is not to avoid making the same mistakes, but rather to treat others with consideration out of an acquired sense of empathy.

Odysseus offers a model for this understanding in the prologue of *Ajax*. Invited by Athena to gloat over his deluded rival, Odysseus declines, for he derives a lesson from the spectacle of the mad Ajax that the goddess, being a goddess, cannot: 'I pity him in his misery, though he is my enemy, not thinking of his fate, but my own; because I see that all of us who live are nothing but ghosts, or a fleeting shadow' (*Aj.* 121–126). What Odysseus has understood is that he is sane and Ajax is mad, he has won and Ajax has lost, but the situation could easily be reversed; both men share in the vulnerability that defines the human condition.

Odysseus neither loses sight of this revelation nor retreats from its implications. At the close of the play he insists on giving his vanquished rival a proper burial, explaining to Agamemnon that some day he himself will come to the same end (*Aj.* 1365). Although Odysseus endeavours to instruct both Athena and Agamemnon in empathy, he does not succeed. The lesson Athena derives from Ajax's downfall is that the gods demand untiring reverence (*Aj.* 127–133). As for Agamemnon, he lets Odysseus have his way as a favour, not because he has understood him or been persuaded by him (*Aj.* 1370–1373). It is only among the spectators that Odysseus' lesson has the potential to resonate.

Sophocles does not explain how the Odysseus of *Ajax* has arrived at his solitary understanding of the human condition. In *Philoctetes*, however, he shows how empathy can take shape. At the opening of the play the youthful Neoptolemus feels nothing for Philoctetes; as he and Odysseus stake out the cave he catalogues the sick man's miserable effects with cool objectivity (*Phil.* 33, 35–36, 38–39), and although he objects to deceiving him, it is out

⁶² Cf. Whitman (1951) 106: 'None of Sophocles' characters exhibit such sheer intelligence as these two, and none try harder to achieve good ends'.

⁶³ Exceptionally, at *OC* 5–8 Oedipus affirms that his sufferings, time, and his own nobility teach (διδάσκει) him contentment with his lot. For *pathos* in the play, see Markantonatos (2002) 33.

of concern for his own honour. Once he has met Philoctetes, however, Neoptolemus moves from simulated to genuine compassion, which ultimately manifests itself in a decision to abandon the Trojan expedition, with all its prospects for glory, in order to bring Philoctetes home. Neoptolemus' evolution suggests that empathy cannot be taught via injunction or exemplary tale; it develops from experience and over time.

The empathy that can reconcile bitter enemies and transcend self-interest may be new to tragedy, but it is not new to Greek literature. In *Iliad* 24 Priam travels to the Greek camp and begs Achilles to return Hector's body; his appearance and his words prompt Achilles to identify the old man with his own father and grant his request.⁶⁴ The representation of empathy, however, is especially potent in tragedy. Because drama is the mimetic genre *par excellence*, the fellow feeling experienced by tragic characters can replicate itself in those members of the audience who are 'thoughtful and emotionally engaged at the same time'.⁶⁵ If those spectators absorb something of Odysseus' or Neoptolemus' empathy from watching *Ajax* or *Philoctetes*, then they have acquired an attitude beneficial to their own civic lives, and Sophocles has proved an able instructor.

⁶⁴ For analysis of Priam's speech and Achilles' reply, see Macleod (1982a) on *Il.* 24. 486–506 and 518–551.

⁶⁵ Woodruff (2008) 182. For theatrical mimesis, see *ibid.*, 123–140.

SOPHOCLES AND PHILOSOPHY

Emily Wilson

In Sophocles' *Electra*, the antagonistic relationship between Clytaemestra and her daughter, the play's protagonist, is explored with far greater depth and intensity than in Aeschylus' treatment of the same story, the *Libation Bearers*. A set-piece confrontation (*agon*) between the two in the middle of the play demonstrates many of the issues at stake. Clytaemestra first defends her murder of Agamemnon, on the grounds that it was just revenge for his own murder of their daughter, Iphigeneia. Electra responds by defending her father (he was 'forced' to do it, βιασθείς, 575), and accusing Clytaemestra of much less exalted motivations (her desire for her new lover, Aegisthus). She goes on to deny that Clytaemestra is even her mother, since she behaves in such an un-motherly way (597–598). The Chorus reacts to the exchange with moral confusion, and further bickering ensues:

ΧΟ. ὀρώ μένος πνέουσιν· εἰ δὲ σὺν δίκῃ
ξύνεστι, τοῦδε φροντίδ' οὐκέτ' εἰσορώ.
ΚΛ. ποίας δ' ἐμοὶ δεῖ πρὸς γε τήνδε φροντίδος,
ἥτις τοιαῦτα τὴν τεκοῦσαν ὕβρισεν,
καὶ ταῦτα τηλικούτος; ἄρ' αὖ σοι δοκεῖ
χωρεῖν ἄν ἐς πᾶν ἔργον αἰσχύνης ἄτερ;
ΗΛ. εὖ νυν ἐπίστω τῶνδ' ἐμ' αἰσχύνην ἔχειν,
καὶ μὴ δοκῶ σοι· μανθάνω δ' ὀθούνεκα
ἔξωρα πράσσω κοῦκ ἐμοὶ προσεικότα.
ἀλλ' ἢ γὰρ ἐκ σοῦ δυσμένεια καὶ τὰ σά
ἔργ' ἐξαναγκάζει με ταῦτα δρᾶν βίᾳ·
αἰσχροῖς γάρ αἰσχρὰ πράγματα· ἐκδιδάσκεται.
ΚΛ. ὦ θρέμμι· ἀναιδές, ἦ σ' ἐγὼ καὶ τᾶμ' ἔπη
καὶ τᾶργα τὰμὰ πόλλ' ἄγαν λέγειν ποεῖ.
ΗΛ. σὺ τοι λέγεις νιν, οὐκ ἐγώ. σὺ γὰρ ποεῖς
τοῦργον· τὰ δ' ἔργα τοὺς λόγους εὐρίσκεται.

CHORUS: I see how upset she is, but whether rightly—
I no longer know what to think about that.

CLYTEMESTRA: Do I even need to think about that girl?
She has so insulted the woman who gave birth to her,
and at her age, too! Don't you think
there is no limit to her shamelessness?

ELECTRA: Let me tell you now, I am ashamed of this,
even if you don't believe it. But I know the reason

why I act out of season and unlike myself.

Truly, your own hatred and your actions

compel me forcibly to act this way.

Shameful deeds are taught by shameful deeds.

CLYTAEMESTRA: What an outrage! No! I, and my words,
and actions, always make you talk much, much too much.

ELECTRA: You said it, not me. Because you were the one
who did it. Actions invent words.

This passage is not obviously ‘philosophical’ in most modern senses of the word, and does not look much like the kind of work we might identify today as ‘philosophical drama’. Sophocles does not write plays that are primarily witty meditations on the history of philosophy, in the manner of Tom Stoppard. His plays are not, like Jean-Paul Sartre’s, encapsulations of a single philosophical position. And compared to his own contemporary, Euripides, Sophocles’ response to the philosophy of his time is less obvious and less explicit.

But the linguistic terms and concepts which were most important to the philosophers of his day—the Sophists—are everywhere in Sophocles. In the *Electra* passage just cited, what is at stake is not just any old conflict between mother and daughter, presented in timeless or mythical terms. Rather, the problems at issue are closely related to fifth-century philosophical debates. Four key issues, which were all hot philosophical topics at the time, stand out here. First, is justice separable from power or force? And how can one know what is just? Second, how do words relate to actions? Do words respond to actions, reflect reality, or constitute their own alternative sphere of action? Third, how is nature related to culture or law (φύσις/νόμος). Are human beings, and human societies, the result of natural bonds and natural hierarchies, or did culture—as several Sophists argued—develop gradually and create the relationships that we now perceive as natural? Are social divisions and relationships formed from nature, or convention? And lastly, a point related to all the others: is it possible to change people through education? Is education a tool for good, or might teachers like the Sophists—as in the negative portrayal of Socrates in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*—actually corrupt the young, teaching them to pervert language and use it against their (natural) superiors?

All these issues are, I will suggest, at stake in Sophocles’ *Electra*, in complex ways that suggest a deep engagement with contemporary philosophical discourse. I choose to focus on this play because it is relatively little studied in the context of Sophocles’ philosophical interests. This in itself makes it a good test case for investigating whether Sophocles might show

signs of philosophical engagement even in a text which does not strike most modern readers as 'philosophical' (by contrast with *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*). Before turning back to the play, I will sketch how Sophocles' relationship with contemporary philosophy has been seen by modern scholars, and also outline what might be at stake for the dramatist, in political as well as intellectual terms, in including philosophical issues in the texture of his plays.

1. *Sophocles the Unphilosophical?*

Philosophy was a new and controversial feature in the cultural landscape of fifth century Athens.¹ The Sophists, who mostly came from cities outside Athens, brought new educational methods to the city, as well as radical new ideas in topics ranging from ethics to rhetoric, theology to natural science, linguistics to political thought. The term 'Sophist' covers a number of figures, such as Gorgias, whom we might hesitate to label 'philosophers' rather than teachers of rhetoric. Plato, in the next generation, would present the Sophists in negative terms, as opportunists who had no real wisdom to impart, but demanded high fees for their services from the gullible rich fathers of impressionable young men. Dialogues such as *Gorgias* or *Protagoras* suggest that Socrates, the 'true philosopher', was quite different from the false pretenders to that title, the Sophists. It is hard not to let Plato's negative presentation colour our own approach to the philosophers of the fifth century, excluding Socrates, especially since none of their work survives intact.

But some Sophists were clearly thinkers and theoreticians as much as rhetoricians; and it is important not to dismiss them out of hand. The Athenian public of the time was obviously fascinated, not merely horrified, by the phenomenon of sophistic teaching. Rich parents paid for their services, and even poorer citizens would have some access to the general gist of their ideas.

These ideas included some radical rethinkings of traditional Greek beliefs. For example, Protagoras began one of his books with the declaration, 'Concerning the gods, I have no way of knowing whether they exist, or do not exist'. Theological scepticism was perhaps the most notorious thread in sophistic thought, which made its way into the dramas both of

¹ Rihll (2003) gives a useful introduction to the culture of education in Athens at the time of Sophocles.

Euripides and Aristophanes. The sophistic Socrates depicted in *Clouds* insists on eliminating the Olympian gods, and substituting new ones like Basin or Whirlpool. Euripidean characters frequently express scepticism even about the myths in which they themselves appear.

What was at stake in the sophistic movement was not merely theological, but political. The Sophists began to enter the city at a time of great civic and democratic pride in Athens, in the early fifth century. The very presence of teachers who claimed to be able to improve the citizens' ability to speak and to think was a phenomenon closely linked to the rise of democracy: in the new Athens, it was not only birth and money, but skill in speaking, which generated real cultural capital. Some of the Sophists were explicitly concerned with training their students in public speaking. Gorgias focused on the power of the spoken word, which he described as having a kind of magic to it: the ability to beguile or enchant the mind, as if to create something out of nothing. Indeed, one of his most famous arguments, *On Nothing*, set out to prove precisely that nothing exists. Again, the emphasis on the power (and danger) of the spoken word was a theme that had particular potency in a culture where demagogues might wield control over a democratic populace.

In terms of ethical content, as Peter Rose has rightly emphasized, the work of the Sophists was intricately connected to the formation of a new democratic identity for Athenian citizens, to replace archaic political models based on the idea of inheritance of aristocratic excellence. The first generation of Sophists—most prominently, Protagoras of Abdera—developed theories about the early history of humanity that had direct political implications. Humans, Protagoras seems to have suggested, have no natural rights or superiority over one another. Society is the product of human endeavour and human need, not nature. Protagoras put all humanity, not the gods or human rulers, and not just one person but all people, at the centre of the universe: 'Man is the measure of all things', he famously declared. He acknowledged that some have more skill than others, but suggested that we can all improve, by (his own) educational methods. A little later, Antiphon the sophist proposed an even more radical re-imagining of the relation of nature to law, arguing that all people (including, apparently, women and barbarians) are equal by nature, and that 'justice' is purely conventional: 'justice is conforming to the rules and regulations of the community in which you are a citizen'. Similarly, Thrasymachus seems to have proposed a version of natural right: justice, he argued, is 'the advantage of the stronger'—apparently meaning that moral norms are merely conventions followed by fools. All these ideas took root in a society in search of a

new intellectual foundation for the new democratic system, and threatened the traditional values of the old ruling classes.

It is a well-established fact that Euripides was interested in the writings and teachings of the Sophists. Characters in Euripides often express distinctly contemporary and distinctly sophistic views, including scepticism about the traditional Olympian gods,² and doubts about the objectivity of moral standards. Many of his plays present struggles involving characters (like Medea) who are smarter than other people, and whose cleverness may be dangerous to those around them, or themselves, or both.

A contrast has often been drawn between the deliberately controversial, provocative, revisionist, and philosophically-minded treatment of myth that we find in Euripidean tragedy, and that of the 'pious' Sophocles, who was supposedly still inhabiting an 'archaic' mindset, despite being almost an exact contemporary of Euripides.³ In support of this picture, we are often reminded that Sophocles is absent from Aristophanes' *Frogs* entirely, while Euripides is portrayed as the poster-boy of the new ideas in the city. In an article called, provocatively, 'Sophocles the Unphilosophical', D.A. Hester argues that *Antigone* contains 'a mighty conflict of people, not one of principle'.⁴ He presents Sophocles as a religious traditionalist, who believed in the archaic, immoral Greek gods, and was untroubled by issues of theological complexity. Hester's main target is the (then) orthodox, post-Hegelian position that the *Antigone* is a particularly 'philosophical' drama, more so than other Greek tragedies, in that it presents a conflict of one value against another. He argues that it is mistreating the drama 'to turn it into a philosophical treatise', and that *Antigone* is no more 'philosophical' than any other Greek tragedy. Hester gives a convincing corrective to the tendency to over-intellectualize Sophoclean drama, especially *Antigone*. On the other hand, ideas and dramatic effectiveness are not mutually exclusive, and it does not follow that Sophocles could not have made use of philosophical writings and teachings as part of the fabric of his drama.⁵

² One locus classicus is Heracles' scepticism about the gods in *HF*.

³ View of Dodds in (1954); Nestle (1910); further bibliography on this in Rose (1992).

⁴ Hester (1971).

⁵ Whitman (1951) argues that whereas Euripides was 'destroyed' by Sophistic rationalism, Sophocles 'thought through the implications of religion as a human invention and man as the measure of all things' (228); his mind 'moved amid and transcended' the 'theorizing of the avant garde'.

More recently, scholars have emphasized that Sophocles was by no means cut off from the intellectual currents of his time and place. As is well known, he was a friend of Herodotus (and uses an anecdote from the *Histories* in the mouth of his Antigone). In dramatic and technical respects, he was an innovator: Aristotle tells us that he increased the number of actors from two to three; he also, we are told, invented scene-painting. This does not, of course, necessarily imply that he was also interested in innovative ideas; but it suggests we should be wary of labelling Sophocles too quickly as a traditionalist.⁶

Of course, it is possible that Sophocles was interested in contemporary sophistic philosophy, but was entirely hostile towards it. This is the position adopted by Elizabeth Craik in an important 1980 article. She traces the uses of the word *sophia* ('cleverness' or 'wisdom') and its cognates in the work of Sophocles—a word which increasingly became associated with Sophistic theorizing, teaching, rhetorical skill and education. She argues that there is a shift from the early plays, such as *Ajax*, when the word sometimes appears in a positive sense, to the late *Philoctetes* (404 BC) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (posthumously produced in 401 BC), in which we are shown the villainous Creon and Odysseus resorting to the mere cleverness of words, and betraying real moral values.

But Craik's account makes no distinction between the various thinkers of the fifth century. Our evidence, such as it is, suggests that it would be a gross oversimplification to treat all intellectuals before Socrates as mere logic-choppers or profiteers. Many, in fact, seem to have made general moral claims, and it has been argued that some came close to formulating a theory of 'natural law' which anticipated, in some respects, those of Plato and Aristotle.⁷ Craik also assumes that the negative response to 'the Sophists' in general, which we find in Aristophanes and Plato, would have been universally shared in the fifth century.

Two important recent assessments have argued that Sophocles does indeed weave philosophical ideas into his drama, and, does so in terms that (*pace* Craik) suggest a response to at least some elements of contemporary

⁶ See Hall (2010), who sets her discussion of Sophocles after that on Euripides, to make this point.

⁷ See e.g. Burns (2002), who argues that there was a current of opposition to slavery in the fifth century, based on a belief in the natural rights of humanity; he links this strand of thought to Sophocles' *Antigone*, and her appeal to the 'unwritten laws', which must be obeyed regardless of merely human edicts.

philosophy which is not entirely hostile. Megan Arp's 2006 dissertation on Sophocles and the pre-Socratics argues that one can find in these plays important engagements with both pre-Socratic and sophistic philosophy, which are juxtaposed and played off against one another. She suggests that in general, Sophocles' response to pre-Socratic natural science is more positive in tone than his vision of the later fifth century Sophists.

Peter Rose's reading of *Philoctetes* (1992, building on an article from 1976 in *HSCP*) uses a broadly Marxist framework to give a more sustained analysis of what might be at stake in Sophocles' use of sophistic philosophy. Philosophy, he rightly reminds us, was a forum for conflicts over political and class conflict in fifth-century Athens. Sophocles' plays can be read through the lens of a Marxist 'double hermeneutic': they show traces of conflicting political visions within a changing social context, including not only the defense of an oppressive system (aristocracy, the archaic aristocratic ideal of inherited virtue—to be unveiled by 'negative hermeneutics'), but also pointers towards utopianism ('positive hermeneutics'), the possibility of society remade, not through sophistic philosophy or democratic ideology *per se*, but through a use of the ideas of the Sophists for a complex revision of 'nature', a revised version of *physis* inflected by newer sophistic theory.

I would like here to build on Rose's insights about *Philoctetes*, and apply a version of his mode of reading to *Electra*, a somewhat earlier Sophoclean play (perhaps composed in 413 BC).⁸ The utopian element in *Electra* is much harder to discern. Sophocles invokes key issues raised by sophistic debate (the relation of culture to nature, justice to power, words to things, education to identity). However, he does not here use these terms to condemn or mock the Sophists, but to hint at the moral bankruptcy of his own time, in the last years of the war with Sparta. In 411 BC, probably a little after the composition of this play, Sophocles voted for the oligarchic coup, the government of the 400, that took over the city for a few brief months, before being ousted and democracy restored. Aristotle tells us in the *Rhetoric* that Sophocles, when challenged about his participation, admitted that he knew it was wrong, but did it anyway: 'For there was nothing better' (οὐ γὰρ ἦν ἄλλα βελτίω). *Electra* uses a sustained meditation on sophistic philosophy to present a society in which there might indeed be no viable alternative to injustice. Sophistic ideas are appropriated and reinterpreted by different characters to suit their own.

⁸ See Kells (1973) 1–2.

2. *Justice and Power*

Electra is a difficult and in many ways unpleasant play. The subject—focusing on the time when Orestes, son of Agamemnon, returns from exile to kill his mother Clytaemestra and her lover Aegisthus—is the only myth about which we have extant tragedies by all three of the great Athenian dramatists. Aeschylus' version is *Choephoroi* (the second play in the *Oresteia*, 458 BC); Euripides' *Electra* was composed probably a short while before that of Sophocles.⁹ Sophocles' is the only version in which there is no explicit representation of the aftermath of the matricide. Orestes is not pursued by Furies, as in Aeschylus; nor are Electra and Orestes put on trial for murder, as in Aeschylus and Euripides. Instead, Sophocles ends his play with Orestes, apparently still sane, driving Aegisthus into the house to be killed. Moreover, Sophocles flips the order, putting Clytaemestra's murder before that of Aegisthus, so that the play ends in anticipation of the more readily justifiable of the two killings. Many readers have concluded that Sophocles' play reverts to a more Homeric approach to the matricide, presenting it as entirely justifiable and legitimate (as it is in the *Odyssey*). Others believe that Sophocles' play is a disturbing expression of moral ambiguity, in a situation where nobody has the moral high ground.¹⁰

I favour the latter reading, and would argue that Sophocles creates moral ambiguity through a sustained meditation on the question asked by several of the Sophists: Is there any such thing as natural justice? Or is force, not justice, the only real motor of human relationships? Is justice merely the name we give to the 'advantage of the stronger', in Thrasymachus' terms? The repeated language of thought or intellectual understanding (φρόνησις) underlines the fact that we are dealing here not only with a mythical family's squabble, but with an issue that touches on contemporary philosophical debates.

In the passage with which we began, the Chorus expresses doubts about whether Electra is speaking 'with justice', σὺν δίκῃ. Clytaemestra's reply suggests that she dismisses even the possibility that Electra might be right: her 'shameless' willingness to talk back to her mother rules her out of further moral consideration. The threat of force (Electra, Clytaemestra assures her, will not escape when Aegisthus returns home) seems to reduce ethics to nothing. Clytaemestra here seems to confront Electra's defense of 'justice',

⁹ See Kells (1973) 1–2.

¹⁰ For further defence of this interpretation, see the edition of Kells (1973).

with echoes of the Thrasymachean idea, that 'justice' is only a mask of power for the strong, or mark of folly in the weak. But earlier in the same *agon*, it had been Clytaemestra herself who drew a sharp distinction between force and justice. She accused Agamemnon of terrible injustice in killing their daughter, Iphigeneia, and speaks of herself as working in conjunction with Justice in killing her husband in turn:

ἡ γὰρ Δίκη νιν εἴλεν, οὐκ ἐγὼ μόνη,
ἢ χρεὶν σ' ἀρήγειν, εἰ φρονοῦς' ἐτύγχανες.

For Justice took him, not I alone,
Justice, which you would have served, if you had been sensible. (528–529)

Electra's response suggests a complex moral position. On the one hand, Electra argues that the murder of Agamemnon was, in fact, unjust, because Agamemnon's killing of Iphigeneia was forced upon him, not committed freely. He acted under compulsion from the goddess Artemis (βιασθείς, 575), whereas Clytaemestra, Electra insists, acted freely, motivated by her desire for Aegisthus.

But, on the other, she implies that justice might not be the only value that matters: an action could be shameful, whether or not it is just—and killing a husband seems to fit the category (558–560). Moreover, she questions the 'justice' of revenge itself: the rule that a death deserves a death is, Electra suggests, conventional, not natural (*nomos* not *physis*, in the terms of the Sophists). She asks whether, even if Agamemnon did kill his daughter to please his brother Menelaus, that was justification for killing him:

ποῖω νόμῳ;
ὄρα τιθεῖσα τόνδε τὸν νόμον βροτοῖς
μὴ πῆμα σαυτῇ καὶ μετ' ἀγνοίαν τίθης.

By what law?
Watch out, if you lay down that law for humanity,
not to lay down suffering and repentance for yourself. (579–581)

Electra herself will, of course, adopt the law she seems to condemn Clytaemestra for instituting. The passage seems to suggest that Sophists like Antiphon might be right: perhaps 'justice' is simply a set of conventions instituted by human beings, and subject to change from one law-giver to another.

In this play, then, no single character articulates a consistent belief in non-conventional, objective moral standards. Electra repeatedly tries to appropriate the language of justice for herself, and invokes an archaic, heroic world, in which honour and glory might trump merely selfish motivations. But as we have already seen, Electra is not consistent in her position;

she also suggests that 'justice' might be a set of rules laid down by human lawmakers, beneficial for one social group and damaging to others. Electra, no less than other characters, frequently recalls the language of the Sophists. In her first debate with Chrysothemis, when she (successfully) urges her sister not to take the tomb-offerings from their mother to their father's grave, Electra frames the difference between herself and her sister in terms that recall the Choice of Heracles—a parable told by the sophist Prodicus.¹¹ Heracles had to choose between two women: one elegant and modest, who pointed him to a rough and stony path, and the other plump and over-made-up, who promised him all the pleasures of a materialist life. The latter acknowledges that her enemies call her Vice, *Kακία*, but her friends call her Happiness; the first is Virtue, who assures Heracles that nothing good can be won except by labour and suffering (*πόννοι*). The path to true glory lies through pain. Electra presents Chrysothemis as addicted to physical pleasure: she emphasizes that Chrysothemis enjoys rich food (*πλουσία/τράπεζα* 361), while her own food is the abstract pleasure of self-satisfaction (*τοῦ μὲ μὴ λυπεῖν*, 363—'not upsetting myself'). In their second debate, when Electra tries to persuade her sister to join her in murdering their mother and her lover, even without the help of Orestes, she presents the killing as the path that involves labour and suffering (*πόννος*—945, 986), but the one that leads to ultimate glory.

The debate between Chrysothemis and Electra about whether to kill their mother becomes encapsulated in two alternative moral principles. Electra declares, 'It is a terrible thing, to speak well and be wrong' (*ἡ δεινὸν εὖ λέγουσαν ἐξαμαρτάνειν*, 1039). Chrysothemis tries to fling the same accusation back at Electra, but she refuses to acknowledge that any of her actions have been in any way wrong. Chrysothemis responds that 'Even justice can be harmful at times', *ἀλλ' ἔστιν ἔνθα χὴ δίκη βλάβην φέρει* (1042). The whole conflict between the sisters is summed up by Electra's refusal to acknowledge that a just action (such as avenging one's father) could ever be unjust or harmful—even when it involves killing one's mother, and risking further pollution on the house.

But Electra is not the only character who believes she has justice on her side. Clytaemestra claims that Agamemnon was killed by Justice, *Dike* (528), in compensation for his murder of Iphigeneia. Moreover, Electra is not the only character who insists that there is only one model of justice.

¹¹ The fullest source is Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 2. 21–34.

Chrysothemis seems (as editors have noted) to recall the language of Protagoras when she remarks that 'there are no two ways of arguing about what is right; rather, one should hurry up and do it' (466–467). Protagoras had said, conversely, that there are always two λόγοι on every issue.¹²

Electra herself seems at times to acknowledge that 'justice', *to dikaion*, comes in many guises, and that different people have their own ideas of what is right. She asks Chrysothemis scornfully, 'Must I follow *your* justice?' (1036). Her point is not that Chrysothemis' position is necessarily unjust, but rather that it is inappropriate to her own nature: 'I would not wish to live by these rules', she declares.

Thrasymachus argued not only that might was more powerful than right, but also that there was, in fact, no difference between the two: justice was only the advantage of the stronger. Electra has claimed the moral high ground for herself and for the matricide she longs for. But after Clytaemestra is dead, it turns out to be the killers who sound most like Thrasymachus. The Paedagogos plays on the range of meanings of *kalos*, which means 'good' or 'noble', but also implies just success, in a sense that is not really moral. 'Everything is going well, even what isn't going well', he declares (1345).

If justice is the advantage of the stronger, then what is just will change, depending on who is stronger at any particular time. Earlier in the play, the Chorus and Chrysothemis have urged Electra to yield to those in power, the 'stronger' (*hoi kratountes*: 219–220, 340, etc.). Electra finally assures Aegisthus that she has, at last, learnt some sense (*nous*), and is willing to agree with those who are stronger (1465–1466). But of course, her utterance is true in a sense that Aegisthus does not realize, since those who have the power now turn out to be Orestes and Pylades, who have already killed his wife, the queen. Orestes has control now, not only of the palace, but even of the meanings of words: 'Your names are all wrong', he tells Aegisthus: 'Those you call the dead are actually alive'. In the last lines of the play, Orestes makes no attempt to present the murder he is about to commit as an act of natural justice. Rather, it is a way of reinforcing 'law', *nomoi* (1505–1507): those who have gone against *nomos* will be punished by death. Matricide, which Electra had initially associated with natural right and with the will of the father, *physis*, becomes finally linked to the cultural specifics of law, convention, and the advantage of the stronger.

¹² The echo of Protagoras is noted in Kells (1973) ad loc., citing Nestle (1910).

3. *Words and Deeds*

If we turn back to our original passage, the debate between Clytaemestra and Electra, we can see that language is a central point of contention. Clytaemestra accused Electra of constantly using herself, her actions, and her words, as fodder for more words; Electra retorted that Clytaemestra's actions were to blame, since they provoked or 'invented' her words. The impasse is articulated through an intense focus on the power of words, especially Electra's words, which are repeatedly presented as equivalent to deeds.

An emphasis on words was one of the major trends associated with the Sophists; the rhetorical focus was, of course, one of Plato's main objections to their teaching. Gorgias' *Defence of Helen* famously suggests that persuasion (*peitho*) can itself be a form of compulsion, since it is possible to be overwhelmed by the magical, spell-like power of persuasive speech; he concludes that it hardly matters whether Helen was taken to Troy by physical force, or seduced by words.

The relationship between words and deeds (*logoi* and *erga*) is, of course, a concern of all dramatic literature: characters onstage are always invoking action by means of speech. But *Electra* is particularly explicit in its focus on this relationship, and works through a number of important current questions about the value or dangers of speech, as opposed to silent action.

The play gestures towards the opposition that was current at the time, between an old model of archaic, inherited virtue, and the new model of power gained through philosophical, sophistic education, acquired by acculturation and training, rather than inheritance, and reliant on (deceptive) 'words' not (noble) 'deeds'. We can see elements of this model in, on the one hand, Electra herself, who boasts of her fidelity to her father's noble memory, and her refusal to be changed or 'taught' by new words; and on the other, in Orestes, who presents himself as a man of action, not words. But there are a number of ways in which the model breaks down, and we may come to doubt whether these two young mother-killers are really intended to be models of inherited virtue.

The pairing of words and deeds first occurs in the first speech of the play, the prologue by the Paedagogos, who tells Orestes that they must discuss their plans in words right away, since it is time not for hesitation, but action:

ξυνάπτετον λόγοισιν· ὥς ἐνταῦθ' ἐμὲν
 ἴν' οὐκέτ' ὀκνεῖν καίρως, ἀλλ' ἔργων ἀκμή.

(21–22)

Already, the usual contrast is given a twist, since here, words and deeds are not opposites, but complementary elements of the plan: the murder of Clytaemestra will not succeed without the appropriate words. Orestes comes up with the plan: the Tutor is to announce to Clytaemestra that her son is dead—thus ensuring that she will unsuspectingly open her doors to a young man carrying an urn, supposedly containing her son's ashes. Orestes picks up the Tutor's language, noting that he will achieve his aim in reality ('in deed'), and glory, by dying in fictional words:

τί γάρ με λυπεῖ τοῦθ', ὅταν λόγῳ θανῶν
ἔργοισι σωθῶ καὶ ξενέγκωμαι κλέος;

What harm does it do me, if I die in word
when I am saved in deeds and win the glory?

(59–60)

The paradoxical phrase, 'dying in word' is echoed again a few lines later (62–63), and conversely, 'deeds' (ἔργα) are associated with the apparently abstract concepts of time and opportunity (καιρός: lines 31, 39, 75)—a word which was important in the rhetorical teachings of the Sophists. In the mouths of Orestes and his tutor, then, the relationship between words and deeds is not a contrast between 'mere' talk, and 'real' action; rather, words are themselves the stuff of life and death, while deeds follow the rules of rhetorical discourse, and must be brought forward with close attention to timing.

Orestes is presented, in the remainder of the play, as the reverse of voluble. He speaks little, and in the powerful recognition scene between Electra and himself, he tells her no less than eight times to be quiet, so as not to give the game away to Clytaemestra inside the palace. But Orestes' taciturnity, unlike that of Ajax, is not associated with stern, archaic, masculine morality. Indeed, Orestes is the character in the play who sounds most reminiscent of the sophist Thrasymachus, as represented in Plato's *Republic*, who argued that 'justice is the advantage of the stronger'. Orestes utters the first sentiment along these lines in the play: δοκῶ μὲν, οὐδὲν ῥῆμα σὺν κέρδει καχόν: 'I certainly think that no profitable word is evil' (61). Moreover, Orestes is a young man under the guidance of an older educator—a relationship clearly reminiscent of the sophistic model. I will return to these points in the next section.

If the sophistic Orestes is a man of few words, the apparently old-fashioned Electra is a woman of many. Her main characteristic is the inability to shut up. The part is the longest in all Sophoclean drama: Electra is onstage and talking or singing for almost the entire play. The other characters repeatedly reproach her for the excess and noisiness of her grief for

her father, and rage at her mother. For Electra, the endless flow of words is an appropriate corollary to her belief in the absolute evil of her mother's actions: if her father's death was entirely unjust, there is no reason ever to cease bewailing it—or at least not until Clytaemestra and Aegisthus are dead. Words, then, are associated not with sophistry, but with natural and objective virtue.

But at other moments, Electra implies that words are indeed to be contrasted with deeds, and with moral truth and goodness. She condemns her mother in precisely these terms: αὕτη γὰρ ἡ λόγοισι γενναία γυνή (287, 'she, that woman who is noble only in words ...'). She damns her sister Chrysothemis on the grounds that she expresses only verbal resistance to their father's murderers: σὺ δ' ἡμῖν ἡ μισοῦσα μισεῖς μὲν λόγῳ, / ἔργῳ δὲ τοῖς φονεῦσι τοῦ πατρὸς ξύνει (357–358, 'You may hate with me, but you hate only in word; in deed, you are joined up with our father's murderers').

Which, then, is stronger: words or deeds? In the great debate between Clytaemestra and Electra, Electra presents her own words as simply the necessary outcome of her mother's deeds: σὺ γὰρ ποεῖς/τοῦργον· τὰ δ' ἔργα τοῦς λόγους εὐρίσκεται (624–625, 'You do the deed; deeds discover words'). But Clytaemestra herself is terrified of words, and conscious that her own position of power can be destroyed by them: she prays to Apollo and acknowledges her fear that Electra, with her 'much-tongued shouting' (πολυγλώσσῳ βοῇ, 641), may spread the rumour of Agamemnon's murder throughout the city. She uses the same phrase again a little later, welcoming the Tutor if he should manage to shut Electra up at last, and prevent her 'much-tongued shouting' (798). Clytaemestra presents herself as the victim of Electra's words, and implies that she suffers more from the constant verbal abuse of her daughter, than from the fear that her son may kill her.

The play muddies the waters about which characters are to be equated with 'mere' words: is it Electra herself, or Clytaemestra, or Chrysothemis, who is more of a rhetorician? Is Electra's volubility comparable to sophistic rhetoric, or is it a mark of her ancestral virtue, since it shows her unwillingness to compromise, even for her own advantage? Should we associate sophistic deceptiveness with Clytaemestra (who killed her husband openly, with an axe), or with her killers—whose main murder weapon is words? Moreover, we are invited to wonder whether words are really so bad after all. Is it good or bad, in this play, to be open to persuasion, to be changeable, not fixed, in one's nature? This question leads into a further philosophical issue which plays an essential role in the drama, namely the relationship of nature to human laws, conventions, and culture.

4. *Nature and Culture*

The debate between Clytaemestra and Electra hinges on issues of natural right, and especially, on the question of whether any family members have 'natural' duties and 'natural' relationships with one another, or whether all social bonds, including those of the family, are conventional. A second issue at stake here is whether an individual's 'nature' is fixed from birth, or is formed by upbringing and education.

As we have seen, Electra questions Clytaemestra's right to create a 'law', *nomos*, instituting revenge as a social principle. The issue of shame, which recurs throughout the conversation, suggests that there is some natural limit on how family members ought to behave to one another: it is, Electra suggests, naturally shameful or scandalous for Clytaemestra to have killed Agamemnon and married Aegisthus. Clytaemestra responds by pointing to the natural shamefulness of Electra's attitude towards her mother. Electra herself seems troubled by the possibility that she is betraying her own 'nature', by speaking out of turn and acting 'inappropriately for herself', *κοῦκ ἐμοὶ προσεϊκότα*.

As has long been noticed,¹³ Sophocles makes striking and complex use of different senses of the Greek terms for nature and natural excellence, *physis*, *gennaïos*, and their compounds. On the one hand, there is an older, traditional sense associating moral excellence with inheritance: nobility is born, not made. On the other, some of Sophocles' uses suggest that excellence might be a purely moral category, which might have nothing to do with inheritance. The meaning of these words was clearly changing in the course of the fifth century, as society moved away from a model of inherited power and economic status, to include more social mobility. The thinking of the Sophists played a central role in this shift, as they emphasized convention over nature as the guiding principle for human society.

The older generation of intellectuals, the Ionian cosmologists or 'pre-Socratics', had studied nature in terms that were sometimes, apparently, free from moral implications: thinkers such as Thales were apparently interested in how the material world worked, without necessarily making a connection between physics and ethics. But some of the older generation, at least, had already started to wonder whether natural order and political

¹³ Diller (1956); see discussion in Rose (1992) 270–273.

order might have something to do with one another. Heraclitus certainly seems to have connected his vision of a cosmic balance of opposites, with an account of right and wrong in the human world.

By the mid to late fifth century, some of the Sophists had begun to question whether human culture and the natural world were necessarily interconnected. Do we behave as we do by nature, or nurture? And what exactly, within human experience, is natural? Is our sense of right and wrong a cultural phenomenon, or something innate in humanity? These questions were certainly posed by Sophists such as Protagoras and Antiphon, though the answers they gave were significantly different from one another. Note that, for example, even in Plato's *Protagoras*—a text which is not particularly positive in its depiction of the title character—Protagoras' 'Great Speech' suggests that he does believe that justice is something to which everybody in society should aspire, and something which sophistic teachers, such as himself, can help people attain. Other Sophists, such as Thrasymachus (depicted, in unflattering and presumably distorted terms by Plato in the first book of the *Republic*), seem to have identified might with right, and asserted that there is no such thing as what is 'naturally' or 'objectively' right; power and behaviour are the only determinants of moral truth. Sophocles' plays all make use of the language of these debates, in ways that suggest a fairly deep interest in them. But we do not find here a simple siding with nature over nurture, or with moral realism over relativism.

Returning to Sophocles' play, we can see that the issue of natural rights is closely related to the relative values accorded to the two different natural parents: the mother and the father. In Greek, the word φύσις (*physis*) is cognate with the verb for growing or 'being begotten' (φύω). It is then no coincidence that Electra, who closely associates herself with nature rather than law or culture (*nomos*), is also closely associated with her father, not her mother.

But the association between Electra and nature is far from straightforward. For one thing, her excessive grief is characterized in terms of a lack of balance. She herself says,

μούνη γὰρ ἄγειν οὐκέτι σωκῶ
λύπης ἀντίρροπον ἄχθος.

(119–120)

I no longer have strength on my own to keep in balance the weight of my grief.

The image suggests a scale in which Electra and her grief are balanced on two sides of the scale. Alone—without Orestes on her side—Electra's grief outweighs her, tipping the balance. One might think that nature would be associated with balance, as it is in the work of Heraclitus and Anaximander

(who famously described the elements of the universe in terms of ‘balance’ or ‘justice’: ‘They pay back the penalty to one another for their injustices’). The Chorus criticize her imbalanced grieving, which will allow no release from suffering; Electra’s father will not be brought back (135–142). Electra concedes that she is constantly out of balance, out of measure, out of time. She acknowledges the strangeness of her ‘numberless’ laments, ἀνάρηθμος ᾧδε θρήνων (232), and insists that there is an absolute moral principle at stake, which is also a truth of nature (using the verb *phuo*):

καὶ τί μέτρον κακότητος ἔφυ; φέρε,
πῶς ἐπὶ τοῖς φθιμένοις ἀμελεῖν καλόν; (236–237)

And what degree of wickedness is there in nature?
Come on, how can it be good to neglect the dead?

The implication is of course that there is no relative value in wickedness or goodness; neither is the kind of thing that one can measure out in a quantity of more or less. Rather, some things are just bad (such as killing one’s husband); and others, like mourning the dead, are just good, by nature.

But the idea of ‘natural’ goodness becomes problematic within the family, when Electra herself suggests that some members of her family—her mother, and her sister—are traitors to her principles, and therefore entirely different from herself. The Chorus describe Chrysothemis as somebody with the same *physis* as Electra (325)—although she obviously doesn’t exhibit the same behaviour. Electra herself comments that Chrysothemis has betrayed her paternal *physis*: δεινόν γέ σ’ οὔσαν πατρός οὐ σὺ παῖς ἔφυς/κείνου λελησθαί, τῆς δὲ τικτοῦσης μέλειν, 341–342: ‘It’s a terrible thing that you, belonging to the father who begat you, should have forgotten that father and care only for the one who bore you’.

The imagery, too, creates complexities in the association of Electra with ‘natural’ justice. The Chorus compare Electra, constantly weeping and lamenting and longing for revenge, to the nightingale, Philomela (1075–1080), alluding to the story of Procne, Philomela, and Tereus. Electra had already compared herself to Philomela the nightingale early on in the play (107–109), and again made the connection based on her endless grief, and her desire for revenge. On the one hand, the comparison reinforces the association between Electra and nature: she is like an animal, not a human, in her grief, acting by nature, not culture. On the other hand, she is similar not to a regular bird, but a human woman transformed into a bird as the result of rape and horrible revenge. Nature itself, here, seems to be the product of culture. It matters, too, that the comparison turns the structure of the family upside down: Electra mourning her father becomes like Philomela

mourning her murdered children; the virgin Electra models herself on the raped wife. Roles within the family seem, from the perspective of metaphor, not fixed by nature, but infinitely malleable.

At times, Electra implies that she has indeed inherited her *physis* from her mother—and so much the worse. She tells Clytaemestra to feel free to tell the world about her own (horrible and polluting) behaviour:

εἰ γὰρ πέφυκα τῶνδε τῶνδε τῶν ἔργων ἴδρις,
σχεδόν τι τὴν σὴν οὐ καταισχύνω φύσιν. (608–609)

For if I am naturally knowledgeable about this kind of action,
I'm scarcely bringing shame upon your nature.

Insofar as Electra acknowledges baseness in her own nature, she ascribes it all to Clytaemestra.

The theme of matricide lends itself to consideration of natural obligations within the family. But Sophocles and his audience would have been aware that in Aeschylus' treatment of this myth some family relationships are treated as more natural than others. Athena in *Eumenides* famously declares, drawing on contemporary theory, that the father is the real parent, because he provides the seed; the mother is only the vessel. Sophocles' version pushes the question further, prompting us to ask whether, even if motherhood is a product of culture rather than nature, it is therefore less important or less permanent.

The Tutor, giving Clytaemestra the news of her son's death, expects that she will show unmitigated joy at the news. But in fact, she gives a surprising outcry.

δαινὸν τὸ τίττειν ἔστιν· οὐδὲ γὰρ κακῶς
πάσχοντι μίσος ὦν τέκη προσγίγνεται. (770–771)

It's a terrible thing to give birth, because
one can't hate one's children, even when one suffers at their hands.

The lines are difficult to translate, because their degree of abstraction is difficult to retain in English: more literally, 'Terrible is the giving birth; for there is no hatred of what [one] births, even for [one] faring badly'.

Some commentators have found in these lines an astonishing revelation of Clytaemestra's deep sense of maternal feeling, despite everything.¹⁴ But of course they also show her resistance towards whatever positive feelings she has for both her living children. The generalization is part of a

¹⁴ So Kells (1973) Introduction.

complex engagement with sophistic ideas about nature. Clytaemestra appeals to the natural bond between children and mothers, and suggests that it is necessarily greater than the bond between children and their fathers, on which Electra and Orestes rely. In doing so, she seems also to challenge the sophist Antiphon, who included in his examples of behaviour 'at variance with nature' any case where a person increases their own suffering, leading to 'greater pain when less is possible'. Instances included 'people who behave well to their parents, even when their parents mistreat them' (22c, *On Truth*). But unlike Antiphon, Clytaemestra does not seem to view motherhood as a natural bond. In her earlier reminder to Electra, that she is the one who gave birth to Agamemnon's children, one of whom he murdered (530–533), she suggested that motherhood was a relationship stronger than fatherhood, precisely because it depends on a created history, a time of labour, work and suffering (*ponos*), not merely the presence of 'natural' begetting. She suggests that Orestes deserted in childhood not just the mother from whose life he came, but the one who cared for him, who nurtured him:

who was born from my life,
but reneged from my breasts and my nurture,
who became an exile and a stranger. (774–776)

Orestes, though only a baby at the time, is the one who has betrayed the maternal relationship. By contrast, Electra suggests that Clytaemestra herself has betrayed her children, and is therefore a 'mother in name only' (1194). But she shares the assumption that motherhood, unlike fatherhood, is dependent on behaviour; Clytaemestra can become a false mother by failing in her duties, while Agamemnon can never become less than a father.

5. *Moral Education*

The question of whether human nature is fixed by nature, or malleable by culture, is an essential precursor to a further question which preoccupied the Sophists themselves, and also concerned contemporaries as they contemplated the value or danger of philosophical education: can people become better, or worse, through teaching? Does philosophical teaching improve or corrupt the young? Learning is a major issue in all of Sophocles' extant plays. Is it good or bad to learn the truth? What motivates people, as they either press on to discover new things or to adapt to new circumstances, or refuse to do so?

Electra has rarely been discussed in terms of sophistic educational methods and theories.¹⁵ But this drama is intensely focused on issues of teaching and learning, and constantly repeats words associated with education (διδάξις, μάθησις, and their cognates). In the conversation quoted at the beginning of this essay, Electra speaks of herself as forcibly taught, how to think and how to act, in a bad way, by Clytaemestra's actions: αἰσχροῖς γὰρ αἰσχρὰ πράγματ' ἐκδιδάσκειται ('For shameful deeds are taught by shameful deeds'). The play's portrayal of moral education is complex, and does not justify the common claim that Sophocles was hostile to sophistic methods of teaching.¹⁶ The story of Orestes' revenge is not, in Sophocles' hands, about a young man corrupted by new learning. Rather, we see here multiple failures to teach and failures to learn; old aristocratic models of nature and inherited virtue offer no escape from the cycle of revenge and the trap of words in which all the characters are entangled.

Electra includes perhaps the most famous teacher in the extant plays of Sophocles, the Tutor (*paedagogos*), who has raised Orestes and brings him back to Argos. The inclusion of this character is one of the most striking additions by Sophocles to the myth, and addressed prominently in both the ancient Hypotheses to the play. The presence of the Tutor suggests, I would argue, a particular interest in education, and specifically with the type of education associated with the Sophists, namely the education of adolescents. The title *paedagogos* suggests an educator of younger children, and raising Orestes as a child has presumably been his task before the play begins. But within the play itself, the Tutor takes on a role that looks much more like that of a sophist, as he acts as educator and guide to the teenagers, Orestes and Electra (along with Orestes' silent friend Pylades). The Paedagogos is the person who guides Orestes' perceptions of the home to which he returns, having not seen it since infancy. He urges Orestes to plan his revenge, and speaks in the (sophistic) terms of 'words' versus 'deeds'; and it is, of course, he who gives the central and most memorable speech of the play, the description of the chariot race in which Orestes supposedly died—which is, as the audience knows, entirely false.

It would have been quite possible for Sophocles to have used the figure of the Tutor to offer a critique of contemporary sophistic teaching. Thanks, or no thanks, to this sinister and unscrupulous character, the young Orestes

¹⁵ The play has, rather, been seen in terms of traditional Athenian values. For instance, de Wet (1977) stresses the theme of adultery as an innovation by Sophocles, and sets the play in context of popular thought and legal practices of Athens at the time.

¹⁶ Pace Nestle (1910), one of the few critics to discuss the *Electra* in terms of the Sophists.

succeeds in killing his own mother, and apparently does so entirely without remorse. But this interpretation is inadequate for the play as we have it, not least because Orestes seems so eager to kill Clytaemestra even without the Tutor's urging. The Tutor himself, in his first speech, comments that Orestes has 'always' been eager to return home and see the place with his own eyes: ὦν πρόθυμος ἦσθ' αἰεὶ (3). Orestes' own first speech is, significantly, twice as long as that of the Tutor, and it is he, not the Tutor, who lays out the plan to use deceit in order to kill Aegisthus and Clytaemestra. In fact, it seems as much as if Orestes instructs the Tutor, as the other way around.

As in *Philoctetes*, we see in *Electra* a young man instructed by an older one in the ways of deceit. But in both cases, the young man proves remarkably willing to learn the lesson.¹⁷ The moral of the story may be less that Sophists are bad teachers, than that the young are dangerously easy to corrupt. One of the central themes of the play is the refusal, especially on the part of Electra herself, to listen to or be taught by anybody.

Chrysothemis asks Electra why she won't be willing to learn or be taught not to indulge in all this useless emotion or wilfulness, after all this time:

κ οὐδ' ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ διδαχθῆναι θέλεις
θυμῷ ματαίῳ μὴ χαρίζεσθαι κενά; (330–331)

And aren't you willing to be taught by long time not to do empty favours to your useless wilfulness?

Electra replies in terms that pick up the language of teaching:

ἅπαντα γάρ σοι τὰ μὰ νοθετήματα
κείνης διδασκτά, κοῦδ' ἐν ἐκ σαυτῆς λέγεις. (342–344)

All your advice to me was taught you by that woman; you're speaking nothing of your own accord.

She presents herself as somebody who has nothing to learn, and who can herself act as teacher to her sister:

ἐπεὶ διδάξον, ἢ μάθ' ἐξ ἐμοῦ, τί μοι
κέρδος γένοιτ' ἂν τῶνδε ληξάσῃ γόων. (352–353)

Then teach me, or learn from me, what gain it would be for me to cease from these lamentations.

¹⁷ On the sophistic education of Neoptolemus by Odysseus, see Craik (1980), who argues that Sophocles intends to show his suspicion of the Sophists and belief in inherited virtue; on the other side, see Rose (1992), who notes that Neoptolemus' physis is easy to corrupt, and is hardly presented as unambiguously good.

She reverts to the same language later in the conversation, dismissing her sister's attempt at teaching:

ΗΛ. μή μ' ἐκδίδασκε τοῖς φίλοις εἶναι κακὴν.

XP. ἀλλ' οὐ διδάσκω· τοῖς κρατοῦσι δ' εἰκαθεῖν. (395–396)

ELECTRA: Don't teach me to be bad towards my loved ones.

CHRYSTHEMIS: I'm not teaching that, just to yield to those in power.

Some critics have viewed Electra (like the equally intractable Antigone) as an entirely admirable figure, a heroine whom we are always supposed to admire. But her unteachability is criticized, in apparently very reasonable terms, by the Chorus, who comment on her conversation with Chrysothemis:

μηδὲν πρὸς ὀργὴν πρὸς θεῶν· ὥς τοῖς λόγοις

ἐνεστὶν ἀμφοῖν κέρδος, εἰ σὺ μὲν μάθοις

τοῖς τῆσδε χρῆσθαι, τοῖς δὲ σοῖς αὕτη πάλιν. (369–371)

By the gods, please don't get angry. There's benefit in both your words, if you learn to use hers, and she, conversely, yours.

Clytaemestra and Electra both use the language of teaching to one another, but in each case, their demands to be 'taught' only reinforce the fact that they do not really want to learn from each other. Clytaemestra asks her daughter to 'teach' her why Agamemnon killed Iphigeneia (διδάξον, 534); but then goes on to ask a further series of questions designed to show that such murder could never have been justifiable. Electra in turn warns her mother (560–565) that she is unable to learn from the goddess Artemis—presumably because she is too much polluted by her adulterous relationship with Aegisthus—and promises to teach her mother herself how Agamemnon's child-murder was justified. In asking her mother to 'teach' her, she, like Clytaemestra, reinforces her belief that she has nothing to learn: 'Teach me', she demands (διδάξον, 585), 'why you're doing the most shameful thing in the world: sleeping with the murderer with whom you killed my father'.

More broadly, this revenge tragedy raises the question of whether one murder necessarily 'teaches' those who survive to commit another. As we have seen, Electra questions Clytaemestra's actions in avenging the death of her daughter, asking 'By what law?' (ποίῳ νόμῳ; 579) should one murder follow another. As we have seen, too, Electra claims that her mother has 'taught' her to act in the 'shameless' way she does, standing outside the house and talking endlessly, immoderately, about her father's death. Again, it is hard to believe that we are supposed to agree with Electra here, or subscribe to this model of education. If shame teaches shame, Electra's case seems to apply as much to Clytaemestra as to herself, since Clytaemestra

was ‘taught’ to kill her husband only by his own killing of their daughter. The language creates a further link, between Electra’s current behaviour, and that of Agamemnon, who was, Electra claims, ‘forced’ by the anger of Artemis to kill Iphigeneia (575). Electra’s world view seems to leave no room either for persuasion rather than force, or, indeed, any kind of free will. Instead, people act in a constant state of reaction, compelled by whatever has gone before.

Chrysothemis again tries to ‘teach’ her sister, when she has learnt that Orestes is alive and has returned, from discovering the offerings he has left on their father’s grave.

πρὸς νυν θεῶν ἄκουσον, ὥς μαθοῦσά μου
τὸ λοιπὸν ἢ φρονούσαν ἢ μῶραν λέγῃς. (889–890)

By the gods, now listen, so that you can learn from me and then call me either sensible or silly.

But Electra seems to be able to ‘learn’ only from events or actions, things not words. She resists her sister’s description of the offerings at Agamemnon’s tomb, and will not admit them as evidence of their brother’s return. It is significant that Electra refuses to relinquish the urn that she believes contains Orestes’ remains; while she still holds it, she is unable to learn that he is alive (1205–1206). Only when Orestes shows her their father’s signet ring will she finally believe that he is back (1222–1223).

Sophocles plays with different models of how we could learn the truth about the world: by sight, or by the teachings of others. The question of how we can learn the truth—and whether truth is at all accessible to human beings—was a preoccupation of contemporary Sophists; we know that Antiphon, for example, wrote a book *On Truth*, in which he seems to have suggested that appearances are a poor guide to reality. Sophocles’ friend Herodotus makes King Candaules claim that, ‘Ears are less trustworthy than eyes’ (1.8; the word used is ἀπιστότερα, which could mean either ‘untrustworthy’ or ‘less trusting’), but in the course of a sequence of narratives in which visual evidence is often shown to be unsatisfactory or dangerous.¹⁸ In *Electra*, there is a great deal of emphasis on autopsy, but also a great deal of suggestion that belief in autopsy leads us astray. The Tutor assures Orestes that he can now, at last, see his home with his own eyes (3).

¹⁸ On this phrase, see Anhalt (2008), who argues that Herodotus’ narrative undermines the idea that visual evidence is always more credible than oral evidence—and thereby shows why history might be preferable to tragedy.

But what is seen often seems to be misleading. Electra believes that she can 'see' her sorrow, when she sees Orestes himself with the urn that supposedly contains his ashes:

οἱ γὰρ τάλαινα, τοῦτ' ἐκεῖν' ἦδη σαφές·
πρόχειρον ἄχθος, ὡς ἔοικε, δέρκομαι. (1115–1116)

Alas, poor me, now it's all clear to me.

I seem to see my sorrow right here before my hands.

The fact that she is wrong—what she holds is nothing but an item of pottery, a stage prop in Orestes' plot—undermines the whole idea that seeing something with our own eyes guarantees its truth. Later, Electra tells Orestes that her sufferings at the hands of Clytaemestra are actually mostly invisible: 'I see your sorrows', he says (1187); 'You can only see a few of them' (1188), she answers. The doubtfulness of appearances also, of course, may make the spectators of *Electra* mistrust their own experience of the theatrical spectacle. We know, after all, that the empty vase, which is supposed to contain the ashes of Orestes, in fact does not; but also that no stage death is ever actually real.¹⁹

The climax of the play itself is invisible, since the murders happen inside the palace. Murder offstage is a convention of Greek tragedy; but in this play, more than in others, the theatrical convention is a source of moral and epistemological difficulty. Because Clytaemestra has been killed offstage, and her body is then brought out covered, it is possible, in a brilliant plot twist, for Aegisthus to be convinced temporarily that he is looking at the corpse of Orestes. Like Electra, he thinks he knows for sure that Orestes is dead, because he has seen the body with his own eyes. Moreover, Aegisthus himself asks—reasonably enough—why his own killing must take place inside, in darkness: πῶς, τόδ' εἰ καλὸν/τοῦργον, σκότου δεῖ; (1493–1494, 'If this action is good, what need of darkness?'). It is a good question, and no reply is given.

Real death happens invisibly in this play, but the centrepiece of the whole drama is the fictional death of Orestes. The Tutor gives a wonderfully vivid and convincing account of a chariot race at the games, at Delphi, in which Orestes participates. In a close contest, he almost pulls into the lead; but at the last moment, on the very last lap of the race, he cuts the turn too tight, breaks the axle of his chariot, and gets flung down and dragged along in the reins by the careening horses. By the time the corpse was salvaged,

¹⁹ On metatheatrical aspects of this play, see Ringer (1988).

we are told, it was so covered in blood that even his nearest and dearest would not have recognized him.

It is hard to know what to make of this passage, which is one of the most vivid messenger speeches in Sophocles. Classicists have often speculated about the possibility that it could have been based on a real chariot race; but we have no idea if this is true or not. It is more fruitful to think about the function in the play of a teacher whose empirical teaching is both so moving, and so obviously false. The speech allows us to see the very different responses of Electra and Clytaemestra towards Orestes' death: Electra's voluble keening, and Clytaemestra's confused mixed emotions. It teaches us, again, not to trust what we may think we have seen.

The Tutor declares that the real, visible event was far more affecting than the mere telling of it:

τοιαῦτά σοι ταῦτ' ἐστίν, ὥς μὲν ἐν λόγοις
ἀλγεινά, τοῖς δ' ἰδοῦσιν, οἵπερ εἶδομεν,
μέγιστα πάντων ὧν ἔπωπ' ἐγὼ κακῶν. (761–763)

One might think that this kind of declaration would increase suspicion, but oddly, it seems to function as a further assurance of truth: the listeners, both onstage and offstage, feel as if they, too, have seen these events, not merely heard about them 'in words'. As the spell of the speech wears off, however, the audience may come to reflect on further lessons of the scene. It teaches us how easy it is to believe something false, if it comes dressed in plausible words.

If we abandon the attempt to find a historical chariot race to match that of Orestes, it becomes clear that Sophocles is working with various literary antecedents in mind. As has often been noted, the race recalls that of the *Iliad* (23.271 ff.) in the funeral games for Patroclus (see Kells 1973, 138). The mangling of Orestes' body also, more closely, recalls the treatment of Hector's corpse by Achilles—an allusion which works to increase our sense of Orestes' heroism, and to increase our anxiety about whether he, like Hector, might never come home again to protect his family. But recalling the references to chariot-racing within the Orestes story itself may give a different atmosphere to the speech. In Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* (1021–1023), Orestes, when he begins to be possessed by the Furies, says to the Chorus,

ἀλλ' ὥς ἂν εἰδῇτ', οὐ γὰρ οἶδ' ὅπη τελεῖ,
ὥσπερ ξὺν ἵπποις ἡνιοστροφῶ δρόμου
ἐξωτέρω.

I don't know where it will end. I want you to know, I'm driving my chariot with my horses far off from the course. My mind is out of control, it carries me away, I'm defeated ...

As has often been noted, Sophocles has no explicit staging of the possession of Orestes by the Furies in his play. But the vivid description of the chariot race, in which Orestes is, as in Aeschylus, 'defeated' and 'driven from the race-course', allows us to intuit what will happen to his sanity as soon as the play, and the murders, are complete. Moreover, the chariot race, within the context of this story, does not only connote insanity. It also, within Sophocles' *Electra* itself, suggests deceit. The Chorus have reminded us (at 504–515) that the house of Pelops is built on an act of treachery in a race, when Pelops sabotaged the chariot of Myrtilos. Since that first moment of deceit, they sing, 'ruin, full of suffering, has never left this house' (514–515). The two allusions are intertwined, since in this instance, Orestes, the charioteer, is not really the victim of deceit, but its perpetrator. Those who act like Pelops, it seems, will suffer like Myrtilos.

The lessons of the Tutor's false messenger speech, then, are not anti-sophistic. We are shown the power, even magic, of vivid words—a lesson which may be reminiscent of Gorgias' teaching. We are shown, too, how easy it is to be deceived by appearances—an idea which occurs in several of the Sophists, including Antiphon. But we are also taught, implicitly, a more old-fashioned lesson: that deceit and violence lead to no good. More generally, the speech teaches us something about the dangerous habits of the house of Pelops: their tendency to rely on underhand trickery, their refusal to learn from others, and their willingness to kill to get their own way.

Electra suggests a complex attitude towards new models of education, and hence, towards contemporary philosophy. On the one hand, people can teach each other how to plot and deceive, making truth look like falsehood and wrong look like right—all the charges usually levelled at the Sophists. Older men can coach younger ones in the ways of deceit. But the younger characters may, in fact, need no such teaching. And the play also suggests that when somebody, like Electra, refuses all teaching or instruction, her actions may seem 'shameless' or 'terrible', and may, as Chrysothemis suggested, have bad consequences even if they are just.

SOPHOCLES THE IRONIST

Michael Lloyd

Irony is generally regarded as one of the most distinctive and fundamental features of Sophoclean tragedy. The final page of R.P. Winnington-Ingram's book on Sophocles begins with the words 'Sophocles is recognized as the supreme ironist', and concludes 'Sophocles saw human life as tragic and ironical' (1980, 329). A full discussion of irony in Sophocles would be tantamount to a comprehensive interpretation of his plays, and the present chapter aims only to touch on some aspects of the subject.

The concept of 'dramatic', 'tragic', or 'Sophoclean' irony originated in Connop Thirlwall's essay 'On the Irony of Sophocles' (1833), although the term which he himself favoured was 'practical' irony. Thirlwall begins by distinguishing it from the familiar 'verbal' irony, which he defines as 'a figure which enables the speaker to convey his meaning with greater force by means of a contrast between his thought and his expression, or to speak more accurately, between the thought which he evidently designs to express, and that which his words properly signify' (Thirlwall 1833, 483). Thirlwall was familiar with the German philosophers of the early 19th century who had greatly expanded the concept of irony beyond its traditional limits as a verbal strategy.¹ These philosophers included Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), his brother August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845), and Adam Müller (1779–1829). Irony was now taken to include a variety of contradictions, paradoxes, and incongruities which illustrate the failure of human beings to understand the true significance of situations in which they find themselves and the consequent possibility that their actions have very different consequences from those which they intended. A.W. Schlegel thus writes of Shakespeare's *Henry V*: 'After his renowned battles, Henry wished to secure his conquests by marriage with a French princess; all that has reference to this is intended for irony in the play. The fruit of this union, from which two nations promised to themselves such happiness in future, was the weak and feeble Henry VI, under whom everything was so miserably

¹ There is a useful brief account in Muecke (1982²) 18–27; cf. Muecke (1969) 159–215.

lost'.² Schlegel associated irony with comedy, and the concept of tragic irony seems to have been used for the first time by Adam Müller in 1806.³

There may previously have been no name for this kind of irony, although Aristotle's *peripeteia* (*Poet.* 1452a24) shares some elements with it,⁴ but the concept itself goes back to Homer. For example, the seer Eurydamas does not foresee the fate of his two sons, who are killed by Diomedes (*Il.* 5.148–151).⁵ It might be expected that a seer can predict the future, yet (on the most plausible interpretation of the lines) he fails to foresee the fate of his own sons. This kind of irony corresponds to the *OED*'s definition 'A condition of affairs or events of a character opposite to what was, or might naturally be, expected; a contradictory outcome of events as if in mockery of the promise and fitness of things'. This is often termed 'situational' irony.⁶ A good example in Sophocles is the irony identified by Heracles towards the end of *Trachiniae* (1058–1063):

The spearmen of the plain never did such a thing, nor the earth-born army of the Giants, nor the violence of the monsters, nor Greece, nor the barbarian lands, nor every country that I came to in my purifying work. But a woman, a female and unmanly in her nature, alone has brought me down, without a sword.

He does not, however, grasp the other great irony of the play, that his devoted wife Deianeira brought about his death in an attempt to keep his love.⁷

Thirlwall accepts that 'the contrast between man with his hopes, fears, wishes, and undertakings, and a dark, inflexible fate, affords abundant room for the exhibition of tragic irony', but he insists that 'Sophocles really aimed at something higher'.⁸ His concept of 'practical' irony develops from what he calls 'dialectic' irony, which is used, most notably by Socrates, as a systematic means of refuting an opponent's argument. This derives from the original Greek sense of *eironeia*, meaning understatement or dissimulation.⁹

² Schlegel (1861) 432, cited by Muecke (1982²) 20.

³ Cf. Dane (1991) 122–126.

⁴ Cf. Muecke (1969) 47–48, (1982) 69.

⁵ Cf. G. Markantonatos (2009) 27–31.

⁶ For a discussion of situational irony from the perspective of experimental psychology, see Lucariello (1994).

⁷ Cf. Kirkwood (1958) 256; Winnington-Ingram (1980) 316–317, 329; Garvie (2005) 30.

⁸ Thirlwall (1833) 493. This is one of only two occurrences of the term 'tragic' irony in Thirlwall's essay, but it is clear from the other (p. 535) that he regarded it as an appropriate term for the kind of irony which he has been discussing.

⁹ See Diggle (2004) 166–167 for a useful survey of the Greek word *eironeia* and its cognates.

Thirlwall's 'practical' irony is so called because it is 'independent of all forms of speech, and needs not the aid of words' (Thirlwall 1833, 485). The practical ironist may be malicious, encouraging someone under the mask of benevolence to engage in self-destructive behaviour, for example Timon and Alcibiades (Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*), the witches and Macbeth (Shakespeare, *Macbeth*), and Mephistopheles and Faust (Goethe, *Faust*). 'But there is also a practical irony which is not inconsistent with the highest degree of wisdom and benevolence. A man of superior understanding may often find himself compelled to assent to propositions which he knows, though true in themselves, will lead to very erroneous inferences in the mind of the speaker, because either circumstances prevent him from subjoining proper limitations, or the person he is addressing is incapable of comprehending them' (Thirlwall 1833, 486). Thirlwall's example, the father of the prodigal son in the parable (Luke 15.11–32), suggests that his mind here is on the relationship between divine providence and human free will. He concludes the introductory section of his essay by expressing the view that Sophocles conceived destiny 'to be under the direction of a sovereign mind, acting according to the rules of unerring justice', with the result that 'though its proceedings might often be inscrutable to man, they would never be accidental or capricious' (Thirlwall 1833, 492).

Thirlwall believes that Oedipus is better off at the end of *Oedipus Tyrannus*: 'he appears chastened, sobered, humbled: the first and most painful step to true knowledge and inward peace, has been taken' (Thirlwall 1833, 500). His interpretation of *Trachiniae* depends on the audience's awareness of Heracles' future deification. Deianeira's attempt to keep his love has the opposite effect from that which she intended, but in the end her 'wishes have been fulfilled, not indeed in her own sense, but in an infinitely higher one' (Thirlwall 1833, 509). Thirlwall's interpretation of *Ajax* treats his madness as only the culmination of his lifelong pursuit of glory, and the rest of the play as depicting a positive growth of self-knowledge and self-control. He comments on 'the contrast between the appearance and the reality' (Thirlwall 1833, 524), but more specifically observes that Ajax 'out of his humiliation, his anguish, and despair, issues a higher degree of happiness and renown than he had ever hoped to attain' (Thirlwall 1833, 524–525). In *Antigone*, Thirlwall considers 'the balance held by an invisible hand, which so nicely adjusts the claims of the antagonists, that neither is wholly triumphant, nor absolutely defeated; each perhaps loses the object he aimed at, but in exchange gains something far beyond his hopes' (Thirlwall 1833, 490). He comments on Antigone and Creon, 'Each partially succeeds in the struggle, but perishes through the success itself: while their destruction

preserves the sanctity of the principles for which they contend' (Thirlwall 1833, 525). Thirlwall argues that Sophocles 'preserves an ironical composure' towards Philoctetes (Thirlwall 1833, 532), and sees merit in Odysseus' commitment to the public good. Odysseus and Neoptolemus achieve their goals in unexpected ways, and Philoctetes himself gains something greater than he originally envisaged. Thirlwall concludes that 'the idea of a humbling and chastening Power, who extracts moral good out of physical evil, does not seem too refined for the age and country of Sophocles' (Thirlwall 1833, 536).

Thirlwall's view of practical irony thus develops logically from verbal irony by way of dialectic irony. Its most distinctive feature is that it is essentially benevolent. Human action in Sophocles may often be deluded and apparently destructive, but there is a higher power which, like Socrates in a Platonic dialogue, leads the actors to a better end. This is a challengingly optimistic reading of Sophocles, and contrasts sharply with some modern readings which suggest that irony points up only the futility of human ambition and intention. Winnington-Ingram, for example, writes, 'This kind of irony can have no seat except in a flawed world ... Irony responds to disharmony and imperfections which it accepts for what they are, which it exploits and does not deny or explain away' (1980, 329).¹⁰

The concept of dramatic irony which proved to be so influential is less important for Thirlwall than his idea of a providential divine power which, if it is to influence the course of events for the better, must also see a pattern in events which is hidden from the human participants.¹¹ This is common in the *Odyssey*, especially when Odysseus returns in disguise to his homeland. W.B. Stanford cites passages such as 18.112–113, where one of the suitors wishes that the gods may grant Odysseus everything that he desires, suggesting that these touches of dramatic irony 'serve to flatter the reader's intelligence, to increase his feelings of pity, indignation, or anxiety, and to increase the suspense of waiting for the final dénouements'

¹⁰ Cf. Garvie (2005) 44: 'The irony ... springs from Sophocles' deep conviction that human beings by their very nature are flawed and incapable of full understanding'. Lowe (1996) 524 argues that the concept of tragic irony derives from 'the gap between individual and cosmic value' in the *Iliad*, with its 'bipartite cosmos, in which the individual mortal characters are framed in an immortal perspective where will, time, accident, and power are all illusory'.

¹¹ Muecke defines 'dramatic' irony as follows: 'the irony of a character's utterance having unawares a double reference: to the situation as it appears to him and, no less aptly, to the situation as it really is, the very different situation already revealed to the audience' (1982², 29). Cf. Dane (1991) 129.

(1964–1965, ii. lviii). Muecke (1982², 14–15) cites a good example in the *Odyssey* of both verbal and situational irony in a suitor's comment about the disguised Odysseus testing the bow: 'Ha! Quite the expert, with a critic's eye for bows! No doubt he collects them at home or wants to make one, judging by the way he twists it about' (21.397–400, transl. Rieu).

Thirlwall comments, in the case of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, on the 'contrast between the real blindness and wretchedness of Oedipus and his fancied wisdom and greatness' (Thirlwall 1833, 498), and how each step of the disclosure of the truth comes from incidents which either highlight or increase Oedipus' confidence. In *Electra*, the return of Orestes gives a hidden meaning both to Electra's grief and to the confidence of the usurpers. 'Finally, it is in the moment of their highest exultation and confidence, that each of the offenders discovers the inevitable certainty of their impending ruin' (Thirlwall 1833, 504). The dramatist has a quasi-divine role as 'the creator of a little world' (Thirlwall 1833, 490), and the eye with which he views his creations 'will be that with which he imagines that the invisible power who orders the destiny of man might regard the world and its doings' (Thirlwall 1833, 491). Thirlwall considers the ironic attention of a judge to two sincere but partial litigants. He goes on, however, to say that 'the irony lies not in the demeanor of the judge, but is deeply seated in the case itself' (Thirlwall 1833, 490). N.J. Lowe develops this idea, arguing against Vernant that irony rather than ambiguity is the appropriate term for such multiple and contrasting levels of significance in Greek tragedy, because 'it more readily allows that the structure of meaning may reside not just, or even primarily, in the word, but in the world' (1996, 528).¹²

Lewis Campbell objected that irony of the type identified by Thirlwall 'implies the absence or suppression of sympathy, and it cannot therefore be applied indiscriminately to every kind of dramatic contrast' (1879, 126). It may be an appropriate response to the suitors in the *Odyssey*, or to Aegisthus or Creon in Sophocles, but not to characters like Oedipus or Philoctetes for whom we feel more deeply. He doubts whether the spectator of tragedy would 'mentally assume the position of a superior being, watching with tranquil interest the ignorance and vainglory of an ephemeral creature',

¹² For an example of Vernant's appeal to ambiguity where earlier scholars might have found irony, see (for instance) 'The equivocal character of Oedipus' words reflects the ambiguous status that the drama confers upon him and on which the entire tragedy rests ... The ambiguity of what he says does not reflect a duplicity in his character, which is perfectly consistent, but, more profoundly, the duality of his being' (Vernant 1988 [1972], 116).

but rather would feel pity and fear.¹³ Campbell undoubtedly identified an important feature of Thirlwall's definition of irony, namely its implication that the audience is comfortably superior to the characters in the drama, although he does not do justice to his concept of a providential divine force. Modern critics have also embraced the idea of the audience's superiority to the characters. Segal (1993, 85) defines dramatic irony as 'the discrepancy between the larger picture that we, the spectators, see and the small piece visible to the actor who is immersed in the stream of events'. Garvie (2005, 86) writes, 'The characters may think that everything is going well, but the audience, which, like the gods themselves, knows the truth, sees that they are moving ever closer to disaster'. He accepts the consequence, which so offended Campbell, that this makes the audience feel superior to the characters: 'While we identify largely with the characters, Sophoclean irony requires also that we remain to some extent detached' (2005, 45).

This is the nature of the irony in the earlier part of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Oedipus replies to the Thebans' appeal for help in dealing with the plague, 'I know that you are all sick, and, sick as you are, none of you is as sick as I' (60–61). He means that he feels pain not just for himself but for the whole city, the audience knows, however, that he is the cause of the plague.¹⁴ Creon mentions that Laius was the previous king and Oedipus replies, 'I know from hearsay, for I never saw him' (105). The audience knows that Oedipus has indeed seen Laius, and that his relationship extends far beyond merely seeing him. Oedipus will pursue the murderer, 'For it will not be on behalf of a distant friend, but for my own sake, that I shall drive away this pollution' (137–141). The audience is led to feel that Oedipus begins as if he might continue '... but on behalf of a close one' (cf. 258–268).¹⁵ The verbal ironies are more pronounced in Oedipus' appeal to, and then curse upon, the unknown murderer (216–275). He says that he is 'a stranger to the story and a stranger to the deed' (219–220), before excommunicating the murderer:

But now, since I chance to hold the power which once he held, and to have a marriage and a wife in common with him, and since had he not been unfortunate in respect of issue our children would have had one mother—but as things are he has been struck down by fortune; on account of this I shall fight for him as though he had been my father. (258–265)

¹³ Campbell (1879) 130. On Campbell's protest against Thirlwall's use of the term 'irony', see Sedgewick (1935) 23; Kirkwood (1958) 262; Rosenmeyer (1996) 498.

¹⁴ Kirkwood (1958) 252n11 observes that the ironic effect here depends on the audience's prior knowledge of the story.

¹⁵ For more examples, see Stanford (1939) 163–173; G. Markantonatos (2009) 105–125.

Oedipus tries to establish links to Laius, but they are closer than he thinks, and the meaning of their children having one mother is fundamentally changed by the fact that Laius's son was Oedipus himself. Notable as these ironies are, Kirkwood (1958, 253–254) reasonably points out that later dramatists elaborate the possibilities for verbal irony in the Oedipus story much more than Sophocles does, e.g. this passage from towards the end of Act I of *Oedipus* by Dryden and Lee (1679):

OEDIPUS: ... No pious son e'er lov'd his mother more
Than I my dear Jocasta.

JOCASTA: I love you too
The self-same way; and when you chid, methought
A mother's love start up in your defence,
And bade me not be angry: be not you;
For I love Laius still, as wives should love;
But you more tenderly, as part of me;
And when I have you in my arms, methinks
I lull my child asleep.

These are ironies of the kind which Wayne C. Booth termed 'stable': 'the authors have offered us an unequivocal invitation to reconstruct, and the reconstructions have not themselves been later undermined'.¹⁶ His example is the first sentence of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife'. Author and reader stand together; neither is the victim of the irony. Booth contrasts this type of irony with 'unstable' irony 'in which the truth asserted or implied is that no stable reconstruction can be made out of the ruins revealed through the irony'.¹⁷

The irony in the second half of *Oedipus Tyrannus* is more of the unstable type, especially when it derives from the disparity between human and divine knowledge. Any comfortable sense on the part of the audience that it knows the truth is gradually undermined, for example by the following (906–928):

CHORUS: ... For already the oracles of Laius are fading and are being
expunged, and nowhere is Apollo manifest in honour; but the power
of the gods is perishing.

Enter JOCASTA, carrying offerings which she will present to the statue of Apollo
which is on the stage.

¹⁶ Booth (1974) 233.

¹⁷ Booth (1974) 240.

JOCASTA: Lords of the land, the thought has come to me to go to the temples of the gods, bearing in my hands these garlands and this incense. For Oedipus is exciting his mind in excess with every kind of grief, and he is not interpreting new happenings by means of earlier ones like a rational man, but he is at the mercy of the speaker, if he speaks of terrors. So since I do no good by trying to counsel him, I come as a suppliant to you, Lycian Apollo, since you are our neighbour, with these accompaniments of prayer, that you may provide us with some cleansing solution. For now we are all afraid, when we see him, the captain of our ship, struck powerless.

Enter MESSENGER.

MESSENGER: Might I learn from you, strangers, where is the house of King Oedipus? But best of all, tell me if you know where he is!

CHORUS: This is his dwelling, and he himself is in it, stranger, and this lady is his wife and the mother of his children.

There is stable irony here, in that the audience knows that the oracles were veridical and that Oedipus' anxieties are rational. There is also less stable irony. It has often been observed that the arrival of the messenger seems to be an answer to Jocasta's prayer, initially bringing reassurance with his news that Polybus is dead but soon precipitating the final revelation as it emerges that Polybus was not Oedipus' father after all.¹⁸ On the other hand, this irony is not immediately apparent to the audience, and even when it does become apparent we understand no better than the characters the implications of the fact that the arrival of the messenger at this point is an answer to Jocasta's prayer.

The Messenger's three lines, quoted above, end μάθοιμ' ὅπου ('learn where'), Οἰδίπου ('of Oedipus'), and κάτισθ' ὅπου ('know where'). Bernard Knox writes: 'These violent puns, suggesting a fantastic conjugation of a verb "to know where" [in Greek, οἶδα πού] formed from the name of the hero who, as Teiresias told him, does not know where he is—this is the ironic laughter of the gods'.¹⁹ The audience is no position to share this laughter, or to feel that we can understand what Oedipus does not.

Finally, at the end of the passage quoted above, the effect of the Chorus's reply in Greek could be conveyed (as Kirkwood suggests) by a dash: 'this lady is his wife and mother—of his children'.²⁰ This is weirder than any

¹⁸ See (e.g.) Kitto (1966³) 139–140; Winnington-Ingram (1980) 182; Gould (1988) 246.

¹⁹ Knox (1957) 184; cf. Vernant (1988) [1972] 124; Segal (1981a) 223.

²⁰ Kirkwood (1958) 252–253; cf. Stanford (1939) 171; G. Markantonatos (2009) 119. The ambiguity is remarked upon by the scholiast, although only as something which 'pleases' the listener.

of the ironies in Oedipus' words in the first half of the play, as it has no meaning which can be explained in human terms. John Gould writes that, Sophocles' irony 'is practised upon ourselves as audience as much as upon the characters of the play. For the play encourages us constantly to make connections and to draw out implications that in the end we are forced to reassess, to question, and perhaps abandon'.²¹

The opening scene of *Ajax* is an apparently straightforward example of dramatic irony, with Ajax ignorant of the truth of which the audience is aware. This is illustrated by the following extract (91–100):

AJAX: Hail, Athena! hail, daughter of Zeus! How loyally have you stood by me!
Yes, I shall honour you with golden offerings from my booty to thank you
for this catch.

ATHENA: I thank you; but tell me this, have you well stained your sword in
the blood of the Argive army?

AJAX: I have a right to boast, and I shall not deny it!

ATHENA: Did you arm your hand against the sons of Atreus too?

AJAX: So that never again shall they refuse honour to Ajax.

ATHENA: The men are dead, if I understand your words.

AJAX: Let them try to deprive me of my arms, now that they are dead!

He wrongly believes that Athena is his ally (90, 92, 117), although he earlier angered her by rejecting her help (774–775) and she is now in the process of destroying him. He shows equal misunderstanding of Odysseus, and commentators point to the irony that he owes his eventual rehabilitation to the man he regarded as his greatest enemy.²² Ajax may be the victim of irony here, but he is also an ironist himself. The irony in the last line here (100) is of a typically Sophoclean kind. Jebb compares *OT* 1274–1275 where Oedipus says of his blinded eyes 'in future they should see in darkness those they never should have seen', i. e. not see them at all; *OC* 1377, where Oedipus curses his sons 'so that you two may learn respect for your begetters', i.e. kill each other; *Ant.* 310–311, where Creon threatens the guards with execution 'so that for the future you may know where you can get your profit when you plunder'; *Trach.* 1110–1111, where Heracles threatens to Deianeira 'so that she may be taught to proclaim to all that both in life and death I have punished evildoers!', i.e. by her death.²³ Ajax resembles Creon and

²¹ Gould (1988) 246. On the role of Apollo in the play, see further Budelmann (2000a) 171–175; Lloyd (2005) 111.

²² Cf. Kirkwood (1958) 255–256; Stanford (1963²) 182–183 (note on 955), 186–187 (note on 988–989); Winnington-Ingram (1980) 58; Garvie (1998) 160 (note on 364–367), 247–248 (note on 1374–1375), 248 (note on 1382).

²³ Jebb (1896) 26, note on 100.

Heracles in these passages, as well as the suitors in the passages from the *Odyssey* quoted above, in employing irony when he is himself a victim of it.

The interesting discussion of this scene by N.J. Lowe points out that a crudely bipolar definition of dramatic irony is inadequate here, as Ajax is observed not only by the audience, but also by Athena and Odysseus.²⁴ Each of the four (audience, god, intelligent mortal, madman) has a different understanding of every statement. Some accounts of dramatic irony align the vision of the audience with that of the gods, but in *Ajax* these two levels of understanding soon begin to diverge. Athena's vision is incomplete, because she sees only a great man brought low by his lack of *sophrosyne* (the 'pietist' aspect of the play), and never shows any awareness of Ajax's undoubted greatness (the 'hero worshipper' aspect of the play). Irene de Jong expresses this in terms of narratology: 'her divine focalization, though omniscient and coming early in the play, is not the dominant one'.²⁵ De Jong argues, however, that there is an authoritative view of Ajax, even if it is not that of Athena: 'it is apparently the humanistic perspective of Odysseus, expressed early and adhered to consistently until the end of the play, which Sophocles wants his spectators to adopt'.²⁶ Odysseus does indeed recognize that Ajax 'was the most valiant man among the Argives, of all that came to Troy, except Achilles' (1340–1341), and that it would therefore violate the laws of the gods to leave his corpse unburied. He also expresses a sensible view of the instability of human prosperity, which leads him to pity Ajax's misfortune because he sees its relevance to himself (121–126). This is indeed admirable, but Odysseus does not have access to the Ajax which the audience sees in the middle part of the play, and his understanding must therefore remain incomplete. The way in which the play develops shows that not even the audience enjoys 'that sense of control which ... is the peculiar pleasure of the stage'.²⁷

The other notable ironic scene in *Ajax* is Ajax's 'deception speech' (646–692). His argument stresses the unpredictability and mutability of the world, in which nothing is too hard or strong to change or yield to something else. The speech contains some statements of mutability which are undeniably true, for example:

²⁴ Lowe (1996) 526–531.

²⁵ De Jong (2006) 93; cf. Budelmann (2000a) 184–185.

²⁶ De Jong (2006) 93.

²⁷ Sedgewick (1935) 55.

Why, the most formidable and the most powerful of things bow to office; winter's snowy storms make way before summer with its fruits, and night's dread circle moves aside for day drawn by white horses to make her lights blaze; and the blast of fearful winds lulls to rest the groaning sea, and all-powerful Sleep releases those whom he has bound, nor does he hold his prisoners forever. (669–676)

On the other hand, he also chooses examples such as the impermanence of an oath (649) or of friendship (678–683) which are more obviously ironical because of their violation of the Gricean maxim of quality (e.g. 'I have lately learned that our enemy must be hated as one who will sometime become a friend', 679–680).

Ajax's statements of intent are also expressed in ironical terms, especially the following (666–667):

Therefore for the future we shall learn to yield to the gods, and we shall learn to reverence the sons of Atreus.

Commentators remark on the violation of Grice's maxim of quantity in the exaggerated use of 'reverence' here. He could conceivably state without irony that he will reverence the gods and yield to the sons of Atreus, but not that he will reverence his bitterest human enemies.²⁸ Jebb, however, argues that, 'If his profession of "yielding to the gods" were ironical, his real meaning must be that he defies them: he would be a Capaneus, a Mezentius'.²⁹

This brief survey of the 'deception speech' makes clear that it cannot usefully be interpreted in terms of the traditional definition of verbal irony as 'a figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used' (*OED*). Ajax does not mean that day does not follow night or that no one wakes from sleep, and Jebb seems to be right that he can hardly be expressing the intention of defying the gods and blaspheming against the sons of Atreus. It would indeed hardly exhaust the ironic meaning of 'It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife' to reduce it to a statement that this proposition is not universally acknowledged. Modern ironologists have demonstrated the inadequacy of the traditional interpretation, and advanced a variety of competing theories. An example

²⁸ The inversion of terms was noted already by the scholiast. Cf. Winnington-Ingram (1980) 49: 'If there is anything in the speech which betrays its "insincerity", it is this choice of words'; Heath (1987) 187.

²⁹ Jebb (1896) xxxvi, referring to two extreme blasphemers.

is Wilson and Sperber's 'echoic mention' theory: 'The speaker echoes a thought she attributes to someone else, while dissociating herself from it with anything from mild ridicule to savage scorn'.³⁰ The theory does not require the thought actually to have been expressed in a particular form of words by a specific person, but it needs in some sense to be available as a possible relevant utterance. There are various reasons why the speaker may dissociate herself from it, not only (as in the traditional definition of irony) because she believes it to be false. The force of Ajax's irony derives from the eloquence of his statement of the view of the world from which he dissociates himself. This brings us close to the classic interpretation of the speech by Karl Reinhardt: 'the deception grows from an irony which has deeper roots than what we generally call "tragic irony"; here the irony arises from a dawning perception of an everlasting discord between the hero and the way in which the world is organised'.³¹

Ajax thus employs verbal irony in a far more profound way in this speech than in his earlier jibe against the sons of Atreus (100). It was argued above that neither Athena nor Odysseus has an adequate understanding of him, and the obscurity of this speech means that the audience is no longer in a position to feel any comfortable sense of control.³² Discussions of the speech often argue that 'the attentive spectator' (or the like) will realize that Ajax still intends to kill himself, but there are many ways in which it remains puzzling even when studied in full knowledge of what happens later in the play. The immediate response of the Chorus is to sing a joyful ode (693–718), which concludes: 'All things are withered by mighty time; and I would say that nothing was unpredictable, now that Ajax, beyond our hopes, has repented of his anger against the sons of Atreus and his great quarrel!' This is one of four choral odes in Sophocles' extant plays (the others are *Trach.* 633–662, *Ant.* 1115–1154, and *OT* 1086–1109) which express excitement and joy immediately before the tragic outcome is confirmed. A.F. Garvie writes perceptively: 'The beauty of the language communicates the Chorus's joy to the audience ... But the audience does not really share the Chorus's delusion, or, at the very least, it is uneasy'.³³ The emotional force of the Chorus's words would have been reinforced by music and dance, with the result that it

³⁰ Sperber/Wilson (1992) 60 = (2007) 41. For a critique of the echoic mention theory, see Attardo (2001).

³¹ Reinhardt (1979) [1947³] 25; cf. Winnington-Ingram (1980) 54; Garvie (1998) 186.

³² For instance Hesk (2003) 85: 'The ambiguous form of Ajax's language makes it very hard for us to pin down his attitude to mutability'.

³³ Garvie (1998) 192.

seems difficult for the audience to appreciate the undoubted irony of the situation in any detached way.³⁴

The ironies in *Electra* operate on several different levels. Orestes' return in the opening scene makes clear to the audience that Electra's behaviour is based on false premises until line 1227, Clytaemestra's until line 1404, and Aegisthus' until line 1475. There are some straightforward examples of stable irony, whereby the audience knows the truth which is hidden from the characters, for example the dialogue which follows the Old Slave's false report of the death of Orestes (783–796):

CLYTAEMESTRA: ... But now—for on this day I have been freed from the fear
inspired by this woman here and him—yes, she was a worse mischief,
living with me and all the time sucking my very life-blood—now we shall
spend our days, I think, securely, for any threats of hers.

ELECTRA: Ah, miserable me! Now I can lament your disaster, Orestes, when
in this plight you are insulted by this mother of yours! Am I not well off?

CLYTAEMESTRA: Not so; but as he is well off.

ELECTRA: Hear this, Nemesis, of the one who lately died!

CLYTAEMESTRA: Nemesis has heard what she needed to hear and has decided
well.

ELECTRA: Insult me! Now is your moment of good fortune.

CLYTAEMESTRA: Then will not Orestes and you put a stop to this?

ELECTRA: We have been stopped, far from our stopping you!

Clytaemestra thinks that she has been freed from fear (783), but the apparent good news is part of a plot which will bring about her death. Her ironically understated 'I think' (786) points up the irony at her own expense (cf. *Aj.* 100, discussed above), as does her sarcastic echoing of Electra's words (790–793). She thinks that Electra is the 'worse mischief' (784), but it is Orestes who will kill her. Orestes is 'well off' (791), but not in the way Clytaemestra thinks. She says that Nemesis ('goddess of retribution') 'has heard what she needed to hear and has decided well', but it is she rather than Orestes who will be punished. Clytaemestra's ironic question 'Then will not Orestes and you put a stop to this?' (795) will in fact be answered in the affirmative.³⁵

Electra herself is the ironist in her exchange with Aegisthus after the death of Clytaemestra and shortly before he himself will be killed (1450–1457):

³⁴ Contrast Griffith (1999) 314: 'the Chorus have shown themselves fairly normal and reasonable people, yet their inability to recognize what we see staring us in the face starkly underlines the weakness of merely human intellects and endeavours'.

³⁵ For discussion of this scene, see Sedgewick (1935) 34–37; Finglass (2007) 336–337.

ÆGISTHUS: Then where are the strangers? Tell me!

ELECTRA: Inside; they have found a kindly hostess.

ÆGISTHUS: Did they in truth announce that he was dead?

ELECTRA: No, they even proved it, not by word only.

ÆGISTHUS: So can we even see with our own eyes?

ELECTRA: We can, and it is a most unenviable sight.

ÆGISTHUS: Your words have given me much pleasure, not a usual thing.

ELECTRA: You may feel pleasure, if this truly pleases you.

The word translated 'found' (1451) can also suggest the meaning 'accomplished the murder of' (cf. Eur. *Or.* 89). The line translated 'No, they even proved it, not by word only' could also mean 'No, they even showed him to us [sc. alive]'. In the last line of the passage (1457), 'if' for Ægisthus means 'because', but Electra knows that the sight will not in fact please him. The scene proceeds with him eagerly uncovering the corpse which he believes to be that of Orestes but is in fact Clytaemestra's.

Lewis Campbell thought that Sophocles may encourage the spectator to be ironical towards Ægisthus, but that Electra was one of the characters towards whom 'he makes us feel too deeply to leave any room for irony' (1879, 127). It would perhaps be more accurate to say that deep feeling and irony are combined in our response to Electra. Her lamentation in the earlier part of the play is powerfully involving, although we already know that Orestes has returned and that her sufferings will soon be over. Electra is as deceived about her true situation as are Clytaemestra and Ægisthus, for example when she laments Orestes after he has returned alive and pours scorn on Chrysothemis for correctly reporting that he has done so. There are doubts about the reliability of her view of Agamemnon in her debate with Clytaemestra, where she seems determined to justify his behaviour at all costs. Her belief after the Paedagogus' messenger speech that Orestes is dead means that her behaviour for the next 450 lines is founded on delusion. This sequence includes her rejection of Chrysothemis' announcement that Orestes has returned, her plan to kill Ægisthus, and her lament over the urn. The lament is one of the most powerful and subjectively intense speeches in all Greek tragedy, but the urn is empty and the living Orestes is standing beside her. Her heroism and grief are now purely subjective, and not rooted in the understanding of her situation which she earlier possessed. Sophocles draws the audience into identifying with her emotions, while at the same time distancing us from them.³⁶

³⁶ Cf. Lloyd (2005) 77–97.

Finally, there is the question of the 'ironic' interpretation of the play as a whole. Scholars who accept an 'affirmative' interpretation of the play argue that Sophocles, unlike Aeschylus or Euripides, presents the matricide as being unequivocally just. It is an argument in favour of this view that Orestes and Electra have no doubts about the justice of the revenge either before or after the murders, and that both Chrysothemis and the Chorus are generally in agreement with them about it. The possibility that the matricide may be problematic is not considered by anyone. The gods take a similar attitude. Apollo has ordered the revenge, and there are at least hints that other gods support it. Electra's prayers (110–120, 1376–1383) seem to be answered, while Clytaemestra's prayer (634–659) is not. The Furies do not appear at the end, and there is no explicit indication that Orestes will be pursued by them. Supporters of the affirmative interpretation argue that there is a significant difference between the kind of irony proposed by the ironic interpretation of *Electra* and that which is generally associated with Sophocles. P.T. Stevens, for example, writes, 'elsewhere in Sophocles at any rate such irony is an incidental contribution to the total effect and never contradicts the natural impression of the play as a whole' (1978, 112). This may apply to the stable ironies of Electra's scenes with Clytaemestra and Aegisthus, but we have seen that Sophocles also employs less stable ironies which are not resolved in any straightforward way.³⁷

Irony may be less pervasive in *Antigone*, *Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus at Colonus* than in the other four extant plays, although there is still much that could be discussed.³⁸ This chapter has tried above all to show that Sophocles may exploit relatively 'stable' irony, where the audience is confidently aware of truth hidden from the characters, but that he also uses a more complex and 'unstable' irony which unsettles any feelings of certainty which we may have about the real meaning of events.

³⁷ See Lloyd (2005) 99–115.

³⁸ On irony in *Antigone*, see Griffith (1999) 20–21.

PART VIII

ANCIENTS AND MODERNS: THE RECEPTION OF SOPHOCLES

THE RECEPTION OF SOPHOCLES IN ANTIQUITY

Matthew Wright

Sophocles: tragedian; son of Sophilus; Athenian, from the deme Colonus; born during the seventy-third Olympiad (thus seventeen years older than Socrates). He was the first to use three actors and the label 'tritagonist', and he was the first to bring onstage a chorus of fifteen youths (previously they had numbered twelve). Because of his sweetness people called him 'bee'. He began entering the dramatic competitions instead of undertaking military service. He composed elegiac verse, paeans, and a prose treatise *On the Chorus*. His sons were Iophon, Leosthenes, Ariston, Stephanus, and Menecleides. He outlived Euripides and died at the age of ninety. He produced one hundred and twenty-three plays (or many more, according to some), and won first prize on twenty-four occasions.¹

The passage quoted above is Sophocles' entry in the Byzantine encyclopedia known as the *Suda*. The fact that this is among our best sources of information about Sophocles serves as a reminder of the poor state of the evidence. It is extremely difficult to construct any account of Sophocles' career, or of how his work was performed, read, adapted or talked about within antiquity.² To write a full reception history would require access to knowledge which we simply do not have. This chapter, inevitably, gives only a tentative and incomplete picture. Nevertheless, the task is not completely impossible, and the surviving evidence (which consists mainly of Sophoclean quotations, adaptations, and the *obiter dicta* of miscellaneous ancient critics and marginal commentators) does allow us to make a number of important observations.

The *Suda* entry is a useful starting point because it records, in a concise format, almost all of the main strands in the tradition of the playwright's critical reception. Repeatedly one reads references to Sophocles' technical innovations, his 'sweetness', his prolific output, his versatility, and—above all—the unequalled success which he achieved in the Athenian dramatic competitions. All of these characteristics will be encountered again in what

¹ *Suda* Σ 815 Adler. (All translations offered in this chapter are my own.)

² This difficulty is reflected in the fact that few such accounts exist. Easterling (2006a) and Holford-Strevens (1999) give a sense of the limitations and the possibilities. Most (not all) of the primary evidence is collected in *TrGF* IV (Radt) 29–95.

follows. The chapter begins by reviewing the evidence for early performances of Sophoclean drama; it goes on to examine fifth-century comedy as an indicator of the way in which Sophocles was viewed by contemporary audiences; it explores some of the uses made of Sophocles by later poets and tragedians; and it concludes by discussing Sophocles' reception in the ancient critical tradition.

Overall, as we shall see, Sophocles' reception poses an intriguing question: can a writer be, somehow, *beyond criticism*? To be the object of universal and unqualified praise; to be admired on a scale that, seemingly, precludes any kind of criticism (constructive or carping as it might be): this may or may not be a desirable fate for an author, but it is clear that, for literary critics and biographers in antiquity, Sophocles was—simply—the best. In this respect, the study of the ancient reception of Sophocles raises rather different questions from that of Euripides, Aeschylus, Agathon, or any other classical tragedian one might care to name. These other playwrights always had their detractors as well as admirers, and their work gave rise to a range of positive and negative reactions from readers and theatregoers.³ By contrast, responses to Sophocles' work seem to have been unanimous and uncontroversial, as if his pre-eminence was such that no further discussion was deemed necessary.

How this situation came about is unclear. It might be argued that Sophocles' status as the best of the tragedians was fixed relatively late in the process of reception, as a result of literary-critical trends and the gradual formation of a canon of 'classic' authors.⁴ On the other hand, it is possible that Sophocles' immediate contemporaries were of a similar mind, and that the playwright enjoyed much the same status in fifth-century popular culture as in the judgement of later intellectuals and scholars. The gaps in our fifth-century knowledge make it difficult to know what Sophocles' first audiences really thought about his work. But even if one feels inclined to mistrust the evidence of dramatic prizes (which so often, like the Oscars, seem to go to the wrong people⁵), it is fairly clear that Sophocles was much admired in his own lifetime. Although the evidence of Old Comedy is insubstantial and somewhat ambiguous, a number of passages seem to confirm Sophocles' popularity (see below). According to Xenophon, Sophocles was the favourite dramatist of Socrates, who named him, alongside other

³ See (e.g.) Michelini (1987); Kovacs (1994); Lévêque (1955).

⁴ Easterling (2006a) 1 points out that Sophocles' status as instantaneous 'classic' can seem 'suspiciously tidy and clear-cut'.

⁵ The relationship of prizes to the literary-critical tradition is examined by Wright (2009).

venerable figures, as the supreme practitioner of his art: 'In epic poetry I most admire Homer; in dithyramb, Melanippides; in tragedy, Sophocles; in sculpture, Polycleitus; in painting, Zeuxis'.⁶ Only a generation or two after his death, Sophocles was being written about by Aristotle as the exemplary writer of tragedy (see below), and at around the same time (ca. 440 BC) Lycurgus passed a decree that official texts of Sophocles' tragedies should be deposited for posterity in the public treasury at Athens—an act that has been seen as 'a kind of official canonisation'.⁷

1. *Early Productions of Sophoclean Tragedy*

In his own lifetime Sophocles was certainly the most successful of the classical Greek tragedians known to us, if success is measured by the number of times a playwright was allowed to compete at the major dramatic festivals, or by the number of times he was awarded first prize.

Athenians, both in the fifth century and for many years afterwards, made enormous efforts to celebrate their playwrights' prize-winning success and to preserve its memory in permanent form for future generations. The remains of several public monuments attest to the importance which dramatic victories were thought to possess within the city. Often it can seem as if the primary purpose of such monuments is to advertise the largesse or prestige of the producers and financial backers,⁸ but it is clear that in many cases it is the success of the playwrights in particular that is being commemorated. One of the most important surviving pieces of evidence for our purposes is the remains of an inscription (*IG* ii² 2325) from a substantial marble building on the south slope of the Acropolis at Athens. This monument records the number of victories won by leading tragic and comic poets and actors at the Dionysia and Lenaia from the fifth century onwards. Sophocles' name appears on this monument (*col.* i) and stands out because of the fact that he won eighteen victories at the Dionysia—an extraordinarily large number, unmatched by any playwright on the list or (as far as we know) by any other playwright in history. (By comparison, Aeschylus, whose name appears a few lines above on the same monument, won thirteen times.)

⁶ Xen. *Mem.* 1.4.3. Note, however, the alternative tradition that Socrates favoured Euripides: Ael. *VH* 2.13; Diog. Laert. 2.18; Cic. *Tusc.* 4.63.

⁷ Plut. *Mor.* 841f; cf. Garland (2004) 26.

⁸ See (e.g.) Goette (2007); Wilson (2000) 198–262.

The dramatists' prize-winning record was thus monumentalized and transmitted for posterity: this, it seems, was precisely the sort of information that readers in the ancient world, even many centuries after the original performances, wanted to know about the authors whose works they studied. The compiler of the *Suda* invariably mentions prizes in his entries for tragic and comic poets (as in the extract with which we opened); so did many other ancient critics and biographers, drawing on information preserved in ancient plot-summaries and performance records. The number of victories credited to Sophocles varies slightly (a variation which we might attribute to the unreliability of certain sources or to the fact that our sources are referring to victories at different festivals), but it is always unusually high. The anonymous *Life of Sophocles*, quoting the grammarian Carystius, records the number of Sophocles' victories as twenty, adding—significantly—that while the playwright often won second prize, he *never* came last.⁹ Indeed, Sophocles seems to have been viewed by posterity as a 'winner'. According to one account, Sophocles' tombstone was inscribed with the phrase 'Here lies Sophocles, who won first prize with his tragic art': the implication is that his career *as a whole* is judged to have won first prize (in a semi-metaphorical sense).¹⁰

Of course, he did not always win. Notoriously, the tetralogy which included his masterpiece, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, came in second place—a fact that has never ceased to amaze. Philocles (the nephew of Aeschylus), who did win the prize on that occasion, is otherwise a rather obscure figure, but it is useless to speculate on the reasons for his victory. One always has to bear in mind the fact that festival judges were wont to behave unpredictably and might award prizes for a variety of reasons (not all of them based on artistic merit). All the same, it is interesting that the ancient scholar who reports this verdict, by praising the 'charm' and universal appeal of Sophocles' play, implicitly questions the award of the prize to Philocles.¹¹ Even certain modern scholars persist in viewing the award as outrageous or inexplicable, as if Sophocles, in any normal circumstances, could not possibly have lost.¹²

⁹ *Vita Soph.* 8 (= Carystius, *FGrHist* 4.359). Diodorus Siculus (13.103) gives the figure as eighteen.

¹⁰ Cf. a Hellenistic epigram (Athenaeus 13.603–604), which depends for its joke on Sophocles' being seen as recurrently a 'winner', not just in dramatic contests but in other situations too: see Tyrrell (2005).

¹¹ Hypothesis II to Soph. *OT* (based on Dicaearchus [= fr. 80 Wehrli]). Cf. Aristides 46.256 for a similar judgment.

¹² E.g. Jebb (1893) xxx–xxxi; Pickard-Cambridge (1968²) 98–99.

Frustratingly, we are not in a position to say much more than this about the original performances of Sophocles' work. We know that in his first ever competition, in 468 (probably with *Triptolemus* and other plays), he was victorious, that he won again in 438, that he took second prize in 431, that his tetralogy of 409 (including *Philoctetes*) also won first prize, and that his last plays were produced posthumously in 401;¹³ but we cannot say anything else about these productions or the early performances of any other plays. One would imagine that at least some of Sophocles' plays were performed outside Athens in or shortly after his lifetime, and that at least some of them were re-staged at Athens following their initial performances. It seems that in the late fifth and early fourth centuries BC there was an increase in the number of travelling productions of Greek drama, and of re-performances of older tragedies (the programme at the Dionysia, from 386, included revivals of classic plays).¹⁴ Unfortunately, there is little direct evidence for such productions, but it would be surprising, given Sophocles' reputation, if his plays were not given regular performances. This is suggested by a couple of incidental references to Sophoclean plays in fourth-century law court speeches—including, in particular, a mention of 'frequent' performances of *Antigone*—and (hundreds of years later) a vague mention, in one of Lucian's works, to actors who have assumed the roles of Creon and Agamemnon 'on many occasions'—but the evidence does not add up to much.¹⁵

Ancient scholars and commentators add a few tantalizing details about certain specific performances by named actors (of uncertain date). We read, for instance, of a certain Timotheus of Zacynthus, who played out Ajax's suicide scene so effectively that he was nicknamed 'the killer' (*sphageus*);¹⁶ of Theodorus, who was renowned for his female impersonation and elocution in plays including *Electra* and *Antigone*;¹⁷ and, most famously, of Polus, the actor who, when playing the part of Electra, brought onstage an urn containing the ashes of his own son, thus unexpectedly enhancing the play's emotional impact.¹⁸ We are also fortunate to possess a little information about the actor Euaion, son of Aeschylus, who is depicted and named on a

¹³ *TrGF* IV (Radt) Test. 32–41.

¹⁴ See (e.g.) *IG* ii² 2318; Pickard-Cambridge (1968²) 99–100; Csapo/Slater (1995) 221–285; Easterling (1997d); Taplin (1999) and (2007).

¹⁵ Demosthenes, *On the Crown* 120, *On the False Embassy* 247; Lucian, *Nigrinus* 11.

¹⁶ *Σ Soph. Aj.* 864. Cf. Stephanis (1988) § 2416; Hall (2002) 12.

¹⁷ *Plut. Mor.* 737b; *Dem.* 19.246; cf. Stephanis (1988) § 90.3.

¹⁸ *Gell. NA* 6.5.7.

couple of red-figure vases from the mid-fifth century. It has been suggested that these vases show Euaion acting in the roles of Perseus (from Sophocles' *Andromeda*) and Argiope (from *Thamyras*).¹⁹

In general, however, the evidence from vase-paintings on tragic themes—usually seen, tentatively, as an indicator of audience tastes—is disappointing. There are a few notable exceptions, including a mid-fourth-century Apulian calyx-krater which reflects elements from *Oedipus at Colonus*,²⁰ a Lucanian bell-krater of the same period which seems to depict the 'urn scene' from *Electra* (as acted out by Polus),²¹ and a late fourth-century Sicilian calyx-crater which probably relates to the scene in *Oedipus Tyrannus* in which Oedipus interrogates the Corinthian Messenger;²² a handful of other vases are possibly (but not certainly) related to Sophoclean drama. These examples show that at least some of Sophocles' plays remained in the cultural memory of consumers across a fairly wide geographical and temporal range. It is also clear that the artists' choice of images is not always based on strikingly memorable or exciting scenes: this may suggest that the people who bought these artefacts had more than a passing familiarity with the plays depicted. But on the whole, as Oliver Taplin has shown, there are markedly fewer vases definitely relating to Sophocles than to the other major tragedians.²³ Part of the explanation for this may be that certain tragedies—or tragedians—were more 'exportable' than others. As Taplin points out, Sophocles (unlike Aeschylus or Euripides) is not known to have travelled to produce plays outside Attica, and indeed there is no firm evidence that his works were widely known in his own lifetime. All the same, it is perhaps unwise to rely too heavily on the evidence from silence.

We have been talking of productions and performances, but any reception history must also take into account the various processes within society by which tragedians might become widely known or celebrated. In the first place, people went to dramatic festivals: they were closely acquainted with the whole paraphernalia of these occasions, including the preliminary

¹⁹ See Green (2002) 95–96. The vases (Rome, Vatican 16549 and Agrigento, AG7) are illustrated in Trendall/Webster (1971) II.9 and III.2.1.

²⁰ Melbourne A5:8 = Trendall/Cambitoglou (1992) I.136; discussed by Easterling (2006a) 8–9 and Taplin (2007) 100–102.

²¹ Vienna 689 = Trendall/Webster (1971) III.2.5; discussed by Taplin (2007) 96–97.

²² Syracuse 66557 = Trendall/Webster (1971) III.2.8; discussed by Taplin (2007) 90–92.

²³ Taplin (2007) 88–90. A number of additional vases cited by Taplin (22–30; 90–107) may relate to Sophocles, but Taplin is sceptical; he also rejects other identifications suggested by Trendall, Webster, and others (89–90). Green (2002) is less sceptical, and mentions other artefacts which may reflect Sophoclean tragedies.

events as well as the performances themselves.²⁴ Many Athenians would themselves have taken part in tragic performances, as chorus members, dancers, actors and so on.²⁵ People also knew the poets personally, or knew others who did, or heard people talking about them. They produced and consumed artwork which was based on the plays. Some of them (who can say quite how many?) will have bought books and read the playscripts in their own homes.²⁶ Many more, perhaps, will have sung the best-known tragic songs, and recited the best-known speeches, at parties and other sorts of gathering.²⁷ And, of course, they went to watch comedies.

2. *Sophocles' Treatment in Comedy*

Greek comedians were obsessed with tragedy: they quoted it, they parodied it, they made jokes about tragic poets, and they based whole plays on tragic themes. Indeed, comic drama is perhaps our best evidence for the contemporary reception of tragedy at Athens. An excellent study by Ralph Rosen has recently explored the role of comedy in what he calls the 'classicizing' of tragedy. The comedians, he argues, not only reflected but also shaped popular tastes: they facilitated the process by which tragedy maintained its place in the imagination and memory of a mass audience (most of whom would not have had access to texts), and they helped ensure that some tragedians gained greater popularity (or notoriety) than others.²⁸ It also seems that a comedian might choose to pay special attention to one specific tragedian (thus promoting what Rosen calls 'fandom'). It is well known that Aristophanes was a 'fan' of Euripides, and it has convincingly been argued that Cratinus was a 'fan' of Aeschylus.²⁹

Would we not expect, then, that Sophocles had his 'fans' among the comedians? Perhaps so; but the evidence does not exactly support this view.

²⁴ See Csapo/Slater (1995) 103–185 or Pickard-Cambridge (1968²) 1–125 for accessible accounts of the festivals.

²⁵ See Revermann (2006) and Hall (2006) on the degree to which the average Athenian would have been immersed in theatrical culture through participation.

²⁶ The debate over performance *versus* textuality (and related questions, such as the extent of fifth-century literacy and the distinction between mass *versus* elite audiences) continues keenly; see (e.g.) Yunis (2003); Johnson (2008).

²⁷ Evidence for such social practices in the fifth century includes Ar. *Nub.* 1353–13490, *Vesp.* 1219–1230; Eupolis fr. 139 *PCG*; Pl. *Prt.* 347c–e.

²⁸ Rosen (2006).

²⁹ See Silk (2000) on Aristophanes/Euripides; Bakola (2008) and (2010) on Cratinus/Aeschylus.

In fact, one is struck by how little Sophocles features in the remains of fifth-century comedy. The simplest explanation is that most of the material featuring Sophocles has been lost. Alternatively, it may be that Sophocles was seldom subjected to comic treatment. Perhaps his style, compared with that of Aeschylus or Euripides, was harder to lampoon; perhaps his plots were less susceptible to parodic reworking; perhaps he was so universally admired that it was thought to be somehow improper to make fun of him—who can say which explanation is correct? Nevertheless, if Sophocles did achieve fame and admiration largely without the help of ‘fans’ among the comedians, we may have to modify Rosen’s view of the process of ‘classicization’ to some extent.

However that may be, Sophocles is not entirely absent from comedy. He and his work are mentioned occasionally, mostly in the form of passing references and brief quotations or allusions. Such passages are mostly interesting for what they do *not* do: they do not parody Sophocles at length; they do not adapt his work in the form of paratragic pastiche; they do not make fun of his diction; they do not (with one exception) mock Sophocles the man or make scurrilous jokes about his supposed personal habits. All this is in contrast to the comedians’ treatment of other tragedians, which is usually more elaborate in scale as well as pejorative in some way.

Peter Rau, in his exhaustive survey *Paratragodia*, lists a number of passages in Aristophanic comedy which make use of Sophocles.³⁰ Interpretation of these passages is hampered by the fact that more than half of them come from fragmentary comedies, or quote tragedies which are lost. However, nearly all of them constitute very short citations or allusions, which do not seem to be central to the humour and which are not developed at length. As far as we can tell, the Sophoclean quotations are there primarily to impart a tragic ‘flavour’ to the scenes in question: beyond that, there is no sense that any particular point is being made or that any critical judgement is being implied. Such passages show that Aristophanes, and at least some of his audience, knew the Sophoclean source-texts well—indeed, they must have known them *very* well in order to detect the (often obscure and fleeting) allusions. We may perhaps conclude that Aristophanes was writing for a relatively sophisticated audience who had access to, and intimate knowledge of, copies of the texts of Sophocles.

³⁰ Rau (1967) 214 (listing *Ach.* 75, *Av.* 275, 851–852, 857, 1240, 1337–1339, *Nub.* 1154–1155, *Ran.* 664–665, *Eq.* 83, 1099, 1229–1230, *Lys.* 139, 450, *Thesm.* 21, 870, *Vesp.* 59, 119, 148–149, 160, 166; *Plut.* 541, 635–636, 1151, *frr.* 168, 308, 415, 452, and a few more doubtful examples).

Extended quotation or parody is rare. One possible example comes from the opening scene of Aristophanes' *Birds*, which may owe something to Sophocles' lost tragedy *Tereus*. At the end of that tragedy Tereus, Philomela, and Procne were all transformed into birds,³¹ while in Aristophanes' play, the characters Peisetairus and Euelpides go off to join the birds in Cloudecuckoo-land—and bump into Tereus in his new life as a hoopoe. The following exchange (*Birds* 96–101) may suggest that Aristophanes wants his audience to think of Sophocles' treatment in particular, not just the Tereus myth in general:

TEREUS: My two visitors, surely you're not mocking me as you look at my plumage? Why, I was once a man.
 PEISETAIRUS: We're not laughing at you.
 TEREUS: What are you laughing at?
 EUELPIDES: It's your beak which we think looks ridiculous.
 TEREUS: Well, that's how wretchedly Sophocles treats me—Tereus!—in his tragedies.

There are certain broad correspondences between the tragic and comic situations which could no doubt be exploited for humorous effect, but the loss of *Tereus* makes it impossible to say precisely to what extent Sophocles' play was a model for Aristophanes: perhaps it was only evoked here, for the purpose of a single joke. The ancient commentator on this passage remarks that Aristophanes made 'much mockery' of Sophocles' Tereus,³² but it is hard to detect any other definite echoes of the tragedy elsewhere in *Birds*. One recent interpretation treats *Birds* as 'a sustained conversation between genres' and argues that the play 'presents a commentary on Sophoclean innovation',³³ but there is not really enough evidence for us to be confident that this is true. It is also hard to interpret the nature of the 'commentary' on Sophocles: what is the 'wretched treatment' that Sophocles is said to have inflicted on Tereus? This may refer to Tereus' metamorphosis into a bird, though, presumably, Sophocles was not the first to introduce this aspect into the myth. Probably Aristophanes is drawing attention to the fact that Sophocles actually staged the metamorphosis (rather than just narrating it): it does seem that we are meant to focus on Tereus' funny bird costume and beaked mask.³⁴

³¹ *TrGF* IV (Radt) fr. 581–593; cf. Lloyd-Jones (1996) 291–301.

³² *Σ Ar. Av.* 100.

³³ Dobrov (2001) 105–106.

³⁴ Kock (1927) ad loc., followed by Dobrov (2001) 108–109.

Other comedians apart from Aristophanes referred to Sophocles from time to time. A character in Eupolis' *Taxiarchs* mentioned Sophocles by name, and (seemingly) quoted from his *Tereus*: the papyrus which preserves the relevant fragment presents various interpretative difficulties,³⁵ but it shows that *Tereus* was striking and memorable enough for more than one comedian to allude to it. A few other fragments of Eupolis contain allusions to Sophoclean plays, including a passage from *Prospaltians* which parodically reworks a well-known simile from *Antigone*.³⁶ Strattis, who is known for his penchant for paratragic comedy, wrote a *Philoctetes* which may have been a pastiche of Sophocles' play of the same name; and Phrynichus may have written a comedy which parodied Sophocles' *Andromeda* at length, but nothing much survives of either comedy.³⁷ Thus there is still no firm evidence for extended parody of Sophocles, though one may compare, from some decades later, the opening lines of Eriphus' comedy *Aeolus*, which take off the (presumably famous) opening lines of *Trachiniae*.³⁸ Whether or not Eriphus' play was a sustained attempt at paratragedy, it at least provides another signal that Sophoclean drama was known to the audiences of comedy (through the medium of performances or texts) for some years after its original composition.³⁹

Cratinus made a passing reference to Sophocles in his comedy *Cow-herds*,⁴⁰ in which he complains about an archon, Gnesippus, 'who didn't grant a chorus to Sophocles when he applied for one, but *did* give one to Cleomachus, whom I wouldn't judge fit to act as my chorus-trainer even for the Adonia!'. This fragment is unusual because it shows that Sophocles did not always win. All the same, it is important to realize that Cratinus is not joking at the expense of Sophocles. The point is that Sophocles *ought* to have won: if even such an unquestionable genius as Sophocles failed to get a chorus on this occasion, this Gnesippus is evidently an undiscerning idiot.

³⁵ Eupolis fr. 268 PCG (= POxy 2740): this lacunose papyrus comes from a first-century AD commentary on *Taxiarchs*. Discussed and translated by Storey (2003) 24, 330.

³⁶ Eupolis fr. 41, 219, 260.23–26 PCG (cf. Soph. fr. 890 Radt, *OT* 629, *Ant.* 712–715); see Storey (2003) 328–329.

³⁷ Strattis fr. 44–45 PCG; Phrynichus fr. 68 PCG (cf. Σ Ar. *Clouds* 556). Bakola (2010) 152 suggests that Cratinus' *Drapetides* parodied Sophoclean dramas on the subject of Theseus, but the evidence is flimsy.

³⁸ Eriphus fr. 1 PCG: discussed by Kassel/Austin ad loc.

³⁹ Cf. also Antiphanes fr. 228 PCG for fourth-century parody of Sophocles.

⁴⁰ Cratinus fr. 17 PCG: discussed by Olson (2007) 176–177.

Apart from an allegation, in Aristophanes' *Peace*,⁴¹ that Sophocles was avaricious (Sophocles is said to have 'turned into' Simonides, who wrote poetry to order in return for large sums of money), the comedians' attitude to Sophocles is remarkably free of criticism or hostility. This is especially true of two comedies produced at the Lenaia of 405, shortly after Sophocles' death: Phrynichus' *Muses* and Aristophanes' *Frogs*. The plots of both these comedies included dramatic contests between dead poets, and both involved Sophocles in some way. It has been suggested (on rather shaky grounds) that the plot of *Muses* centred on a contest between Sophocles and Euripides, adjudicated by the Muses themselves.⁴² This suggestion is implausible, as others have shown, for various reasons.⁴³ In fact we cannot know how prominently Sophocles featured in *Muses*, nor whether he appeared as a character. Nevertheless, one fragment is notable for its praise of Sophocles:

Blessed Sophocles, who lived a long life and died a lucky and clever man: he wrote many fine tragedies, and he had an easy death, unmarked by suffering.

These lines have the distinct ring of an epitaph or eulogy.⁴⁴

The poetic contest at the centre of *Frogs* takes place in the Underworld between Aeschylus and Euripides, but Sophocles is also included (perhaps as an afterthought on Aristophanes' part). This comedy must have been largely conceived and written in or before 406, which means that Sophocles was still alive when it was begun but died at some point during the play's composition: this explanation would account for certain inconsistencies and awkward passages.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the resulting scenario is revealing about late fifth-century attitudes to tragedy, and it has clearly exerted an influence on the later history of critical reception, not least in its construction of a 'tragic triad' consisting of Aeschylus-Sophocles-Euripides (see below).⁴⁶ The fact that the contest now involves three tragedians means that it functions as a counterpart to tragic competitions at the Athenian festivals. In this respect it is significant that Euripides (who is Dionysus' favourite poet) comes last, while Aeschylus wins and Sophocles comes

⁴¹ Ar. *Pax* 695–699; see Olson (1998) 210–211 and *TrGF* IV (Radt) Test. 104a–d.

⁴² Meineke (1839) i.157; cf. K-A vii. 409.

⁴³ Most recently, Harvey (2000).

⁴⁴ fr. 32 *PCG*: Schmid/Stählin (1946) 38 describe the fragment as 'einen herrlichen Gedenkspruch'.

⁴⁵ See Dover (1993) 6–9; Russo (1966).

⁴⁶ See Hunter (2009).

second. However, since Aeschylus ends up being returned to the upper world, it is Sophocles who will inhabit the 'throne of tragedy' for posterity.⁴⁷ In a sense, then, Sophocles (as ever) emerges as a 'winner'. Aristophanes has already prepared us for this outcome, because early on in the play Sophocles is said not only to be a better poet than Euripides but also to be perfectly content to stay down in the Underworld, just as he was content in life.⁴⁸

Although *Frogs* contains some complex and idiosyncratic ideas about tragedy in general, its view of Sophocles in particular is in line with what we see elsewhere: he is a great poet as well as a good man. Aeschylus and Euripides are criticized in detail; Sophocles is simply admired. It is surprising to encounter this overwhelmingly sympathetic portrait from the comedians, especially when we bear in mind that Sophocles was a politician as well as a poet. But, unless one is to suspect the omnipresence of irony, it seems that Sophocles was somehow a special case, immune from mockery just as he was resistant to criticism.

3. *Sophocles as a Model for Later Poets*

If Sophocles' plays remained well known and widely admired throughout antiquity, it is natural that they should have been used as models for later Greek and Roman poets. However, although we can detect signs of Sophoclean influence in a variety of texts, it is frustrating that in most cases we are not in a position to make direct comparison between the source text and its adaptation, since either one or both are lost.

Sophocles' treatment of myths may have come to represent the best-known or standard version: this is suggested by, for example, Apollodorus, who drew heavily on tragedy when compiling his *Library* of Greek myths in the second century BC. At any rate, the writers of later classical and Hellenistic tragedy would probably have composed their plays with Sophocles in mind. Tragedians of all periods, who repeatedly dramatized the same old myths, habitually adapted or responded to their predecessors in various ways in order to demonstrate their own powers of creativity and innovation. The influence of Sophocles was no doubt reflected in Carcinus' *Ajax* and *Oedipus*, Astydamas' *Athamas*, *Antigone*, and *Mad Ajax*, Theodectes' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, and many other intriguing-sounding plays from the fourth

⁴⁷ Ar. *Ran.* 1515–1517.

⁴⁸ Ar. *Ran.* 76–82; cf. *Vita Soph.* 7 on Sophocles' placid good nature.

century onwards which shared titles or subject matter with Sophoclean tragedies. However, the loss of all these plays makes further speculation fruitless.

Occasionally it is possible to detect direct allusions to Sophocles in later poetry, but more often, in the absence of supporting evidence, it is just assumed that Sophocles' classic status and the 'anxiety of influence' would inevitably have led subsequent writers to treat him as an authority (to imitate or reject as it might be). For example, Vergil was demonstrably familiar with *Ajax*, which he quotes or adapts several times in his *Aeneid*.⁴⁹ Ovid, in the *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides*, is often said to have drawn heavily on Sophocles when writing his versions of the stories of Tereus, Niobe, Phaedra, Deianeira, and others, but this is less certain.⁵⁰ Very probably Ovid and his readers would have been familiar with the (now lost) Sophoclean treatments, but we are not in a position to assess the precise nature of Ovid's relationship with his models.

We are on slightly (but not much) firmer ground when considering Roman tragedy. It is fairly obvious, given Sophocles' continuing status in the ancient scholarly tradition, that Roman audiences and readers were familiar with his plays. Sophocles also seems to have been available to Roman readers in the medium of translation: Cicero mentions a Latin translation of *Electra* by Atilius (which he finds defective but still interesting on account of its 'patriotic' content: this may suggest that Atilius' version was a loose translation or adaptation reflecting Roman political values).⁵¹ A number of Roman tragedians wrote plays with titles suggestive of Sophoclean subject matter. Livius Andronicus, in the mid-third century BC, composed a *Tereus*, an *Aias Mastigophorus*, and an *Aegistus* (among others);⁵² Naevius' works include a *Danae*;⁵³ Ennius wrote an *Alexander*, a *Thyestes*, and an *Aias*;⁵⁴ Pacuvius' titles include *Chryses* and *Teucer*;⁵⁵ and Accius wrote a well-received *Tereus*,

⁴⁹ Verg. *Aen.* 2.274–275 (cf. Soph. *Aj.* 924); 4.317–318 (cf. *Aj.* 521); 12.435 (cf. *Aj.* 550–551). Holford-Strevens (1999) 233–234 also detects a double allusion to Sophocles at *Aen.* 1.630 (cf. *OC* 562–564, *Ant.* 1191).

⁵⁰ See Battezzato (2003b) on Ovid's use of Soph. *Niobe* in *Met.* 6; cf. Liapis (2006) on Tereus in *Met.* 6; and Ajax in *Met.* 13; Zwierlein (1987) attempts to reconstruct Sophocles' lost *Phaedra* on the basis of Ov. *Met.* 10. Soph. *Trach.* may have been among the models for Ov. *Her.* 9; see Jacobson (1974) 235–238 and Galinsky (1972) 174–181.

⁵¹ Cic. *Fin.* 1.5.

⁵² See Boyle (2006) 29–33; Hall (2002) 25.

⁵³ See Boyle (2006) 38–41, comparing Soph. *Acrisius*; cf. Sutton (1984) 4.

⁵⁴ See Boyle (2006) 63–79; Holford-Strevens (1999) 221–223.

⁵⁵ See Boyle (2006) 100–111; cf. Cic. *De orat.* 2.46.

which was first produced in 104 BC and subsequently revived on a number of occasions.⁵⁶ A couple of centuries later, Seneca's tragedies, including *Oedipus*, *Phaedra*, *Octavia*, and *Hercules Oetaeus* (the last of which may be the work of another writer), show signs of Sophoclean influence (though these represent only a few of the intertextual allusions in what have been seen as 'palimpsestic' works of literature).⁵⁷

In most of these cases we can go little further than noting the similarity of the titles and making guesses about the debt owed by these writers to Sophocles. It is also important to remember that Sophocles was not the only Greek tragedian to write plays on these subjects, and that Aeschylus, Euripides, and others may have been equally (or more) influential as models. However, in a few cases we can detect more definite signs of the ways in which the Roman writers adapted Sophocles. For example, Cicero discusses in some detail the relationship between Pacuvius and Sophocles, concentrating on the way in which both writers depict characters enduring misfortune.⁵⁸ A few parallels can be drawn between the fragments of Accius' *Antigona* and Sophocles' *Antigone*, including the portrayal of the character of Antigone (though Ismene seems to have been a more powerful presence in Accius).⁵⁹ *Hercules Oetaeus*, which survives in full, is dependent in numerous respects upon *Trachiniae*, including its presentation of Hercules and Deianeira's relationship and the representation of physical pain (though it is, predictably, much gorier than the Greek original).

As before, we are handicapped by the inadequacies of our evidence. But it seems that Sophocles continued to exert an influence on dramatists and other poets for many centuries after his death. Hellenistic and Roman writers did not engage with the full range of Sophocles' plays, but repeatedly showed interest in a limited selection: the myths of Tereus, Ajax, Antigone, and the house of Thyestes and Atreus obviously retained a powerful appeal, while other subjects were ignored. The Roman poets generally seem to have adapted Sophocles to make him 'relevant' to contemporary society or thought. As Holford-Strevens puts it, in his survey of the material, these Roman tragedians are 'mak[ing] Sophocles conform to the self-conscious *virtus* of the *mos maiorum* or of Stoicism'.⁶⁰ In this respect, tragedy clearly

⁵⁶ Cited by Cic. *Att.* 16.2.3, 16.5.1; *Phil.* 1.36. See Sutton (1984) 127–132; Boyle (2006) 128–132.

⁵⁷ Boyle (2006) 205 discusses *Octavia* and its relationship to Soph. *El.* and *Ant.*; Zwierlein (1987) 54–68 investigates intertextuality in *Phaedra*; cf. Töchterle (1994) 9–22 on the relationship between the *Oedipus* plays of Sophocles and Seneca.

⁵⁸ Cic. *Tusc.* 2.48–50.

⁵⁹ Sconocchia (1972); cf. Holford-Strevens (1999) 224–226.

⁶⁰ Holford-Strevens (1999) 222–223.

continued to be regarded as a source of moral teaching, as it was for many classical Greeks. By keeping Sophoclean tragedy alive and adapting it for new contexts, the Roman tragedians can be seen as confirming its value and its enduring appeal as 'classic' drama.⁶¹

4. *Sophocles in Ancient Literary Criticism*

Sophocles may have already been regarded as something approaching a 'classic' in his own lifetime, but Aristotle in the mid-fourth century can be seen as having secured this status forever. It is hard to overstate the importance of his *Poetics* as a document of literary criticism, or its influence in terms of the process of classicization and the creation of a canon. Aristotle mentions Sophocles over a dozen times in the *Poetics*, more than any other tragedian, and he explicitly endorses Sophocles' work by including it in his discussion of the 'best' type of tragedy.⁶² His discussion also implies that Sophocles is to tragedy what Homer is to epic (thus foreshadowing the 'Homeric' strand in the later critical tradition). In addition, Aristotle specifies clear criteria for judging the work. Though we might well take issue with these judgements, or feel that Aristotle's evaluative framework has certain limitations, it is at least clear in the *Poetics* (in contrast to many other writings) just why Sophocles is so greatly to be admired.

Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* is viewed by Aristotle as an exemplary tragedy, both in terms of its plot construction and in terms of its ability to create emotional and intellectual responses on the part of the audience. *Oedipus* is listed as a prime example of plot reversal (*peripeteia*); it is said to be just the right length and degree of intensity; its combination of reversal with recognition (*anagnorisis*) is said to satisfy the requirement of the best type of complex plot; it has the best type of recognition-scene, arising from the events themselves rather than external factors such as tokens; it contains no irrationalities within the plot; its characters all act in ignorance rather than knowledge; its main character is described as the best example of a morally 'in-between' type of person; and in general, it is so constructed that just hearing about the events described might cause us to shudder in fear and pity.⁶³

⁶¹ Cf. Easterling (2006a) 2–4 on 'staying power' or 'multifunctionality' as a defining feature of classic drama.

⁶² See (e.g.) White (1992).

⁶³ Arist. *Poet.* 9.1452a (reversal and recognition), 13.1453a (the 'in-between' type of person), 14.1453b (fear, pity, shuddering, and acting in ignorance), 15.1454b (elimination of

Something else for which Aristotle bears a large responsibility is the formulation of literary history in terms of an evolutionary process of development. Sophocles is seen as fitting into this process as an agent of change, a formal innovator who inherited tragedy from Aeschylus in a semi-developed form and brought it to its fully perfect 'natural state'—chiefly by adding the third actor and scene-painting, and by increasing the size of the chorus.⁶⁴ Aristotle has been criticized for this over-schematic, teleological narrative, but it is clear that he was influential in shaping later critics' views of the genre,⁶⁵ and several other writers from antiquity also present Sophocles as an innovator or a self-consciously critical practitioner of his art.⁶⁶

In other respects Aristotle presents Sophoclean tragedy as 'natural' or normative. His presentation of character falls into this category, though it is subject to certain self-imposed limitations: Aristotle reports a well-known *dictum* of Sophocles to this effect ('I portray people as they should be; Euripides portrays them as they are').⁶⁷ Sophocles' deployment of the chorus is also regarded as exemplary (though in fact Aristotle's description of the Sophoclean chorus as 'one of the actors' can seem over-simplistic or misleading).⁶⁸ For Aristotle, Sophocles is used to set the standards for all future criticism: the name Sophocles becomes synonymous with the best and most classical type of tragedy.

One finds the same image of Sophocles wherever one looks in the ancient critical tradition—Sophocles the classic, Sophocles the genius, Sophocles the winner. We know that he was the subject of numerous critical treatises by (among others) Douris, Diogenes Laertius, Dicaearchus, and Porphyrius, while Philochorus wrote five books *On Sophoclean Myths* (all, alas, lost).⁶⁹ But even when critics were not primarily interested in Sophocles, they cited

irrationality), 16.1455a–b (the best type of recognition), 24.1460b (irrationality again), 26.1462b (concentration of plot and choice of subject matter).

⁶⁴ Arist. *Poet.* 4.1449a. See Lucas (1968) ad loc. and Brown (1984).

⁶⁵ Cf. (e.g.) Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 20; Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.66; Vit. *Aesch.* 1; and Dio Chrys. *Or.* 52 (see below) for similar teleological accounts of tragedy.

⁶⁶ (E.g.) Ister, *FGrHist* 334 F36 (innovations in costume); Vita *Soph.* fr. 79 Wehrli (musical innovations); cf. the *Suda*'s claim that Sophocles wrote a treatise *On the Chorus*. Even if these statements are not factually true, they are a sign of how Sophocles was perceived in antiquity. Plutarch, *De prof. virt.* 7 (*Mor.* 79b) purports to give Sophocles' own account of his linear development as a poet: see Bowra (1940) and Pelling (2007).

⁶⁷ Arist. *Poet.* 25.1460b. This saying was widely quoted: see *TrGF* IV (Radt) Test. 53.

⁶⁸ Arist. *Poet.* 18.1456a.

⁶⁹ See *TrGF* IV (Radt) Test. 148–154.

his works widely as furnishing examples of the best practice, drawing attention to the elegance of his Attic Greek; his eloquence combined with the gravity of his thought; the unusual charm and appropriateness of his word-order; his magnificent skill in conjuring up visual images; his usefulness as a source of moral teaching; his ability to portray character in a very few lines; and the 'sweetness' of his diction. This last attribute, mentioned more frequently than any other, led to his being compared to a bee, a description echoing Homer's description of Nestor.⁷⁰ Indeed, Sophocles was often compared to Homer himself.⁷¹ Socrates is first said to have made the suggestion that each of these two writers was the greatest in his respective genre,⁷² but the comparison is made explicit by a number of writers, including Diogenes Laertius, who called Homer 'the epic Sophocles' and Sophocles 'the epic Homer'.⁷³ One 'classic' is assimilated to another: surely there could be no higher praise than this.

One of the most interesting documents for our purposes is the fifty-second *Oration* of Dio of Prusa. This speech, dating from the first century AD, takes the form of a three-way comparison between Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, with particular focus on their respective *Philoctetes* plays.⁷⁴ In general, ancient scholars were fond of doxographical 'triads' when trying to construct accounts of intellectual and literary influences; but this particular 'tragic triad' can be seen as a replaying of the contest in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, as well as a version of a dramatic competition at the Athenian festivals. Dio himself draws attention to this aspect: he expresses a wish that he could have watched a competition between all three poets, but points out that there was never a date at which all three poets were simultaneously active. We are dealing, then, with an imaginary, ideal, timeless contest—which makes it all the more charged with symbolic meaning. All too predictably, Sophocles emerges as the winner, and, significantly, he is regarded as occupying a 'middle' position in the triad, half way between Aeschylus' archaic grandeur and Euripides' cleverness:

⁷⁰ (E.g.) Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.65–66, *ibid.* 10.68; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp.* 9, 24; Long. *Subl.* 8; Plut. *Quomodo adul.* 28, *De Malign. Herod.* 1; *Vita Soph.* 21; *Suda* (see above; cf. Hom. *Il.* 1.248–249). A large number of testimonia, mainly ancient commentators, draw attention to Sophocles' bee-like sweetness, though the description may go back to Aristophanes (*Pax* 530–538; fr. 581 *PCG*): see *TrGF IV* (Radt) Test. 108–114.

⁷¹ See *TrGF IV* (Radt) Test. 115–116; cf. Tac. *Dial.* 12; *Vita Soph.* 20; Cic. *Or.* 4.

⁷² Xen. *Mem.* 1.4.3 (quoted above).

⁷³ Diog. Laert. 4.20.

⁷⁴ See Russell/Winterbottom (1972) 503–507 for translation and discussion.

Sophocles comes in between the two ... his poetry is dignified and grand, tragic and euphonious to the utmost degree, combining great charm with sublimity and dignity. His handling of the plot, furthermore, is excellent and convincing.

As many have pointed out, the terms of comparison used by Dio are extremely conventional, but the value of Dio's discussion lies precisely in its unoriginality. He is reflecting a thoroughly established, orthodox view of Sophocles that was evidently shared by many others.

The most eloquent discussion from antiquity of 'classic' literature is Longinus' essay *On the Sublime*.⁷⁵ The subject of this work is 'sublimity', or (in other words) artistic genius: some writers simply have this quality, while others do not. Sophocles, unsurprisingly, is presented as a model of true greatness in literature. While Longinus is almost alone in pointing out that Sophocles has certain flaws (which he does not describe in detail), he argues that flawed genius is infinitely preferable to flawless mediocrity—and, as he puts it in a famous rhetorical question,⁷⁶ 'Consider lyric poetry: would you rather be Pindar or Bacchylides? Consider tragedy: would you rather be Ion of Chios or Sophocles?' Longinus goes on to say that no right-thinking person would rate even all of Ion's works together as comparable in value to a single play of Sophocles. Sublimity is an elusive quality: despite Longinus' attempt to describe its sources in detail, it remains unclear precisely why Sophocles is sublime while (for example) Ion is not. One is simply required to accept the judgement of posterity.

As it is, then, our evidence presents a remarkably consistent and unanimous picture of Sophocles' greatness. Of course, one could take issue with this judgement in all sorts of ways: what does it mean, after all, to be the 'best' tragedian? One might even be tempted to think the overwhelming homogeneity of all our testimonia makes Sophocles a peculiarly uninteresting figure in terms of reception studies. At any rate, it can be observed, I think, that Sophocles' 'classic' status has had a marked effect on subsequent scholarship, which even now persists in one form or another. The oddly uncritical admiration of ancient readers has encouraged many modern scholars to understate or oversimplify the complexity of Sophocles' plays, or to base their opinions on an artificially schematic view of the genre,

⁷⁵ On the (disputed) authorship and date of this work, see Russell (1964).

⁷⁶ Longinus, *Subl.* 33.5. Note that Aristotle, too, occasionally criticizes Sophocles—for his presentation of Haemon and Creon's motivation in *Antigone* (*Poet.* 14.1454a) and the messenger-speech in *Electra* (*Poet.* 24.1460a).

in which Sophocles somehow comes to represent an ideal or normative type of tragedy. This sort of criticism tends to make Sophocles seem too easy, even rather bland (while Euripides by contrast is made to seem unorthodox or aberrant).⁷⁷ This is not the place to offer a corrective to such a view—for that, one must go back to the plays themselves—but it may be worth reflecting on other, different ways in which Sophocles' ancient reception could influence our own readings.

⁷⁷ Recent scholarship is beginning to offer more nuanced accounts of Sophocles' place in the development of the genre: see, notably, Sommerstein (2003b).

THE INFLUENCE OF SOPHOCLES ON MODERN LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

Michael J. Anderson

Among the many classical voices echoed in the works of modern artists, Sophocles' voice is one of the most audible and most distinct.¹ Endorsed by Aristotle as the creator of the finest of dramas, Sophocles has been read as the pinnacle of the classical achievement, resting midway between the raw severity of Aeschylus and the baroque innovations of Euripides. His is a voice of inspiration, heroic individual perseverance in the face of overwhelming opposition and crushing adversity. A modern audience, however, will also recognize in his works distressing images of mental anguish and emotional damage, self-absorption and self-delusion, and more than enough doubt and uncertainty to sate the modern appetite for anxiety. His legacy today rests largely on two of the seven tragedies that survive intact. One is *Antigone*, the monumental clash of the state and the family, the group and the individual, conformity and disobedience, political law and divine law. In a century that suffered tyranny in so many vicious guises—National Socialism, fascism, and communist totalitarianism—*Antigone* is repeatedly adapted to voice the defiance of the oppressed.² The other is *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the supreme illustration of man's inability to control his destiny, to appreciate the significance of his own actions, or to grasp fully his true nature.³ Freud's embrace of the myth as an archetype for the darkest impulses repressed in the human soul has certainly fuelled its popularity, but Sophocles' drama remains the authoritative source of inspiration for artists seeking to tap the tragic power of the Oedipus legend. The other plays are emulated with much less frequency, *Ajax* and *Trachiniae* hardly at all.⁴ But the twentieth century witnessed powerful resurrections of the

¹ On the reception of Greek tragedies and Greek tragedy in general, see especially Burian (1997b); Flashar (2009); Garland (2004); Hall/Macintosh/Wrigley (2004); McDonald (1992) and (2003). Also see the notes below on adaptations of individual plays.

² On the reception of *Antigone*, see Steiner (1984).

³ On adaptations of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, see Burian (1997b) 240–253.

⁴ On the reception of *Ajax*, see Hesk (2003) 148–162.

intransigent hero of *Oedipus at Colonus*, the bloodthirsty heroine of *Electra*, and even the bitterly hateful Philoctetes.⁵

Metaphors and models for describing the relationships between classical works of art and their modern analogues are plentiful, from the botanical classification of roots and branches, to the Oedipal obsession with intergenerational conflict. And while no single metaphor, biological or otherwise, can fully encompass the creative engagement of artist with model, I find it helpful to read this engagement as a dialogue, a dialogue which the attentive audience is frequently invited to overhear. The interlocutors may or may not agree; their exchange may lead to heated confrontation, rejection, and denial; or they may build on each other's ideas, discovering new possibilities through their co-operative efforts. The more engaging dialogues are generally those involving a process of give and take, acknowledging both the classical and the modern contribution, recognizing universality through the juxtaposition of particulars. They challenge the audience to hear both voices and to discern the harmonies and the dissonances between them. In what follows I offer a limited survey of examples from the early twentieth century to the present. I have omitted consideration of painting and sculpture, as the modern predilection for visual abstraction resists extended engagement with Sophocles and with narrative art in general. I have concentrated instead on some of the more audible Sophoclean echoes in theatre and film, but even here the list is hardly comprehensive, and many simulating works have been unfairly excluded. This limited selection will nevertheless suffice to demonstrate the richness and complexity of the modern dialogue with Sophocles.

Hugo von Hofmannstahl's 1903 play *Elektra* and the opera Richard Strauss subsequently produced in collaboration with Hofmannstahl (1907) feature a decidedly modern reincarnation of Sophocles' heroine.⁶ A century earlier Goethe had endorsed purification and healing as tragedy's highest spiritual functions in his *Iphigenie in Tauris* (1786), a reworking of Euripides' drama. Orestes suffers from a debilitating madness as a consequence of murdering his mother—one of the most horrific violations in the mythological repertoire—but he achieves a miraculous catharsis through the saintly purity of his sister Iphigenie. The incorruptible heroine succeeds both in abolishing the barbaric ritual of human sacrifice and in soothing violent

⁵ On revivals and adaptations of *Oedipus at Colonus*, see Markantonatos (2007) and Rodighiero (2007). For *Philoctetes*, see Mandel (1981) and Roisman (2005) 112–125.

⁶ On Hofmannstahl and Strauss, see Puffett (1989).

hostility between Greek and barbarian. Hofmannstahl and Strauss, by contrast, shift their focus to the dreadful act of matricide itself, rejecting Goethe's inspirational vision of salvation and concord.⁷ The sensible Iphigenie is replaced with the fanatical Electra, her father's murder ever an open wound on her soul, her mother's murder the only medicine that drives her forward. The drama reaches its climax in vengeance and bloodshed, a gross distortion of the purification accomplished by Iphigenie. Madness is unleashed, not cured. Strauss captures Elektra's frenzy in a series of strikingly discordant musical motifs, and her infectious madness extends its influence into the powerful sweep of his orchestration, Wagnerian yet seemingly cacophonous at times. When in the closing moments of the production the noise of celebration rises, Electra famously declares that the music emanates from her ('ob ich die Musik nicht höre? sie kommt doch aus mir', Strauss/Hofmannstahl 1909, 41). Her words seem to reflect not only her part in making possible the communal celebration, but the central role of her obsession as inspiration for the entire poetic and musical production.⁸

The Electra of Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* could not have provided an adequate prototype for this self-obsessed diva. Although she loathes her father's murderers and wishes for their death, her involvement in the action is severely limited. Aeschylus allows her no direct confrontation with Clytaemestra, and he removes her entirely once her brother is sufficiently inspired to complete the task, whereas Hofmannstahl's heroine must be intimately involved in the murders, not confined to the shadows. Euripides' more vigorous Electra, who ultimately orchestrates her mother's murder, might have made a suitable model, but she lacks the fierce independence of Sophocles' heroine. The impact of her initiative is diminished by the sympathetic allies accompanying her throughout the play, whereas the determination of Sophocles' Electra is enriched by her isolation from the other characters. In resurrecting Sophocles' heroine, Hofmannstahl accentuates and enlarges characteristics that he discovers already existing in his model, but he propels his heroine to new emotional extremes. He deepens Elektra's isolation, depriving her of a compassionate chorus, and sharpening the contrast between her and her timid sister. More significantly, he swells the heroine's desire for her mother's death into an all-consuming bloodlust. Sophocles' Electra, confronting her mother, already openly acknowledges the desire. But Hofmannstahl goes further, allowing Elektra to relish a

⁷ See Forsyth (1989) 21–22.

⁸ See Abbate (1989) 107–110.

fantasy of her mother's death and to delight mercilessly in her mother's pain. In both the ancient and the modern drama Electra resolves to undertake the murder herself once convinced that Orestes will not return. But Hofmannstahl greatly magnifies her manipulative powers as she attempt to persuade her timid sister to join her. Though ultimately barred from participating directly in the murder, both Electras hear their mother's screams of agony ring out from the palace, and both zealously exhort Orestes to 'strike again' (*El.* 1416; Strauss/Hofmannstahl 1909, 37). But Hofmannstahl's heroine never fully recovers from her intoxication. So exhausting is her triumphant dance over Aegisthus' defeat that she collapses, apparently falling dead—a sharp departure from the final word of Sophocles' heroine, 'deliverance' (*El.* 1490). It is as if, with her greatest dream now realized, she need live no more.

Stravinsky's 1927 oratorio *Oedipus Rex* is another striking synthesis of classical drama and modern music.⁹ While the Latin libretto, based on a script by Jean Cocteau, establishes an often mass-like solemnity, Stravinsky's haunting singing lines and violent orchestration effectively unleash the primeval emotions at work in the classical myth. Cocteau's script is largely faithful to the outline and spirit of Sophocles' drama, but much of the original language is condensed or discarded, allowing an obsessive concentration on selected disturbing elements of the myth: oracles and crossroads. Although Sophocles' choral odes have been extremely condensed, the Chorus of plague-suffering Thebans remains a powerful counterpart to the principals throughout, beseeching Oedipus to rescue them at the start, lamenting his precipitous fall at the close. Creon appears upon his return from Delphi to report the god's will, but he does not reappear to defend himself from Oedipus' accusations of treachery, nor does he usher the blind Oedipus back into the house at the close. Stravinsky's Oedipus retains the self-confident and impulsive character of his Sophoclean model. He reassuringly recalls his victory over the Sphinx, he rashly and haughtily suspects Teiresias of conspiring with Creon (*invidia fortunam odit*), and he adamantly asserts his intention to discover his parentage (*Sciam*). After recognizing himself as the murderer, however, his voice is silenced. The most powerful voice in the play is Jocasta's. The Chorus rejoices at her entrance, when, like Sophocles' matriarchal peacemaker, she commandingly halts the quarrel between Oedipus and Teiresias, scolding Oedipus for quarrelling in a time

⁹ On Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, see White (1985²) 327–339.

of public crisis (*nonn' erubescite, reges*). Cocteau also preserves the heavy irony of Sophocles' original. When Jocasta, attempting to reassure Oedipus that oracles always lie, recalls the death of Laius at the crossroads, she paradoxically causes him alarm, reminding him of his own fateful encounter at the crossroads. Stravinsky underscores this irony by having her deliver her supposedly reassuring words—*oracula, oracula mentita sunt* ('the oracles have lied')—in a fast and agitated staccato, and the Chorus contributes to the alarm by chanting the word *trivium* repeatedly as Oedipus recalls the event. From here it is only a short step for her to recognize Oedipus as her son. Her continued insistence that Oedipus 'beware oracles that lie' (*cave oracula quae mentiantur*), repeated with even greater agitation than before, is no longer reassurance, but a desperate and futile effort to deny the truth and shield Oedipus from the inevitable horrific discovery.

In a lavish 1992 performance of the work, conducted by Seiji Ozawa at the first Saito Kinen festival and starring Jessye Norman as Jocasta, director Julie Taymor brought Stravinsky's oratorio to life with an array of stunning visual effects: masks, spectacular puppetry, and a company of dancers augmenting the Chorus and miming the singers.¹⁰ The principals wear masks inspired by Cycladic figures above their faces, giving each singer a universalizing, iconic appearance, while endowing the production with a primitive, pre-classical atmosphere. An enormous shield-like disk, a central element of George Tsypin's stage design, descends intermittently upon the stage. At times it is dark and womb-like: the curtain opens with the Oedipus dancer suspended supine before the disk, hanging from a red sash representing the umbilical cord, his ankles transfixed by enormous pins like those that later appear on Jocasta's headdress. By contrast, the disk becomes golden and reflective like the sun when Oedipus recalls his victory over the Sphinx; here the Oedipus dancer stands above it, triumphing over an enormous Sphinx puppet, whose face, body, and wings split apart upon defeat. The polysemous stage device ominously reflects Oedipus' confused and shifting identity—now husband, now son, now king and champion, now accursed outcast. As Oedipus recalls his encounter at the crossroads, statues of Laius in his chariot and Oedipus on foot clash behind the singers along a path of intersecting red ribbons, the *trivium*, and the Oedipus dancer slides powerless from the womb-like disk onto an enormous Cycladic mother-idol, a

¹⁰ See Taymor (2005) for the production and interviews with Taymor, Tsypin, Ozawa, and Norman.

descent symbolic of the inevitable incest consequent to the parricide. In a striking departure from Greek convention, we witness Jocasta commit suicide, hanging herself with a red sash echoing the red umbilical cord and the intersecting ribbons of the crossroads, and we witness Oedipus blinding himself with two enormous pins from her headdress, the same pins that transfixed the ankle of the infant Oedipus. A cleansing rain falls upon the stage as the Oedipus dancer exits, hunched and stripped of his royal clothing. The stylized dancing and masks monumentalize this production, not distancing the characters and their anguish from the audience, but rather rendering them more immediate and more terrifying. The production is archetypal and universalizing, encompassing the ancient and the modern while fusing the traditions of Western theatre and music with Japanese theatre and dance.

Cocteau's *La Machine infernale* (1934), produced some seven years after his collaboration with Stravinsky and after his translation *Oedipe roi*, is a more independent adaptation of the Sophoclean material. The fourth and final act contains the familiar revelation of Oedipus' identity, together with the traditional suicide and self-blinding, while the preceding acts supplement the Sophoclean conclusion by dramatizing the preliminary episodes—the arrival of the young Oedipus in Thebes, his defeat of the Sphinx, and his marriage to Jocasta. It is a distinctly Freudian elaboration on Sophocles, focusing on the curious sexual dynamics between mother and son. The play begins with an unmistakable borrowing from *Hamlet*: Queen Jocasta, still in mourning for Laius, visits the ramparts of the city to question a guard who has reported seeing the old king's ghost. Cocteau is perhaps reacting to Freudian readings of Hamlet's Oedipal relationship with his father and mother, which had been circulating since the beginning of the century.¹¹ The invocation of Hamlet, who now conversely becomes a model for Oedipus, alerts us to the potential power that repressed incestuous desires will exercise over Cocteau's characters. In Cocteau's drama, however, the ghost delivers a message not for the son, but for the mother; and it is the mother whose incestuous desires are more fully explored. While the young soldier who has seen the ghost clearly reminds Jocasta of the son she might have had, the son who was exposed, she nevertheless displays a disturbing sexual

¹¹ See Jones (1910) and Freud (1913³), ch. 5, n41. Hamlet supposedly hesitates to murder Claudius, the man who murdered Hamlet's father and married his mother, because Claudius' actions reflect Hamlet's own repressed Oedipal desires; confronting Claudius would require him to face his own repressed desires too directly.

fascination with the young man's physique. Moreover, as she muses on her non-existent son, prophetically imagining his heroic defeat of the Sphinx, her thoughts turn to the naïve assertions of boys that they will marry their mothers when they are grown, an idea she endorses with more than motherly indulgence. Paradoxically, the ghost attempts to avert the impending marriage between Jocasta and Oedipus, but it succeeds only in arousing Jocasta's appetite for a younger man. When next we see Jocasta, on her wedding night in Act III, Cocteau reveals the psychological source of her peculiar fascination with younger men, the most compelling of the playwright's innovations. Exposing her baby boy has left Jocasta emotionally scarred and guilt-ridden. She keeps the infant's cradle in her bedroom as a constant reminder of the loss. She attempts to unburden herself of guilt by divulging her secret to Oedipus, but his priggish responses prevent a full confession. She seems unsure in this scene whether she wants Oedipus as a lover or a son. While part of her expects him to appreciate her as a woman—she fishes for compliments—she repeatedly mothers him, as if to compensate for the loss of her child.

Cocteau endows his Oedipus with little or no ethical depth, as if to highlight the Sophoclean contrast between self-perception and reality. When the Sphinx, disguised as a girl, attempts to seduce him in Act II, Oedipus does not resist her advances with heroic determination; he simply lacks the appetite. He is thoroughly unromantic, acknowledging public acclaim as his chief ambition, while dismissing loving and being loved as desires alien to him. Cocteau exposes him as a hero without a heart, a mere child. Nor has he inherited the intellectual prowess of his Sophoclean ancestor. He does not solve the Sphinx's riddle. Instead, she voluntarily gives him the answer to her riddle, hoping that he will reciprocate with love. But the self-interested Oedipus chooses simply to claim a victory, however hollow. On his wedding night in Act III he remains the self-absorbed hypocrite, still flushed with his empty victory over the Sphinx, but highly critical of others' moral errors. He needs a mother more than a wife. Gone, in short, are the magnificent king and queen of Sophocles play, replaced by a vulnerable mother and her undistinguished son. The pervasive verbal irony remains, as neither character recognizes the true import of their own words, but Cocteau's work is a psychological character study rather than a chilling dramatic action. Whereas Sophocles showcases the moment the trap snaps shut on Oedipus, Cocteau instead shows us the spring of this infernal machine as it slowly unwinds, as his prologue explains. And we watch as the confused desires of these flawed mortals lead them deeper into the trap and ever closer to the inevitable tragic conclusion.

Jorge Ali Triana's 1996 film *Edipo Alcalde* (*Oedipus the Mayor*) transplants the ancient Theban legend into present-day Colombia, giving new life to the myth while creatively recasting Colombian conflicts in a classical tragic mould.¹² The inspiration for this infusion of the mythical past into contemporary Latin America came from Gabriel García Márquez, who co-wrote the screenplay. The Theban plague is now the civil violence in a Colombian town in the Andes, where the local police force engages in a futile attempt to halt hostilities between rebel guerrillas and the private militia of the wealthy landowners. Edipo, the newly arrived mayor, is an optimist, determined to bring peace to the region, just as his Sophoclean precursor was determined to rid Thebes of the plague. The young Edipo, however, has mistakenly murdered his father Layo on his journey to the town, this time in a shoot-out on a narrow bridge, wide enough for only one car to pass at a time. He winds up sleeping with his mother Yocasta shortly afterwards. As the Sophoclean domestic transgressions are re-enacted, so too is Oedipus' political failure; Edipo's ignorance of his own acts of parricide and incest parallels his failure to recognize his limitations as a leader and his inability to cleanse the region of violence. In fact, when Edipo tries to negotiate an alliance with the rebels, his visit to their camp paradoxically exposes their location to their enemies, and violence erupts. He thereby unintentionally becomes a catalyst for war, reflecting the ironic role of Sophocles' Oedipus as the ruler who seeks to cleanse the city of the plague but is ultimately revealed as its very cause. There is no precise analogue for the Sphinx, but the filmmakers have retained Teiresias as a blind coffin-maker, his profession eerily allied with his ability to see death. While the film borrows much of Sophocles' plot, including the climactic suicide and self-blinding, it is not merely a derivative retelling, but asserts its artistic and cultural independence. Some noteworthy elements have no direct Sophoclean antecedents: the defiant black stallion that both Edipo and Creonte can ride but not fully tame, the priest who calls for peace but is ultimately slaughtered in the conflict. The Colombian 'plague' does not end with Edipo's departure from the town.

Steven Spielberg's 2002 film *Minority Report*, based on a short story by Philip K. Dick, attests Sophocles' continued pertinence not only to the modern world but to the future world of science fiction.¹³ The film does not

¹² On Oedipus in film, see Winkler (2008). On Greek tragedy in film more generally, see also Michelakis (2004).

¹³ My colleague Michael Mordine first pointed me toward the tantalizing connections between *Minority Report* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*. On the Sophoclean elements of the film, see also Bakewell (2008).

closely adapt the plot of *Oedipus Tyrannus* or the Oedipus myth, but it does re-enact the Sophoclean conflict between free will and destiny, and the filmmakers playfully acknowledge Oedipus as a source of inspiration. It is 2054 and the murder rate in Washington, D.C. has been reduced to near zero by a revolutionary forensic experiment: a trio of genetically engineered child prophets or 'pre-cogs' foresee murders before they occur, and a 'pre-crime' police team intercepts the would-be killers before they can kill their victims. (The filmmakers invite us to accept the conspicuous contradiction here in the fact that these future crimes are 'foreseen' but nevertheless averted by police intervention.) The system works without any apparent flaws for six years, until the prophets foresee a murder committed by John Anderton, the very police captain in charge of the pre-crime squad. Equipped with foreknowledge of his crime, Anderton struggles to establish his innocence and prove the prophecy false. He is a new Oedipus, determined to overturn his fated future, and, like his classical ancestor, his bold efforts to contradict his fate paradoxically lead him to the very scene of the predicted murder. But instead of crushing him under the overwhelming force of destiny, the film departs from the Sophoclean pattern and privileges man's ability to shape his own future. Unlike Oedipus, Anderton asserts control over his actions before violating taboos, and his words and deeds carry no momentous import beyond his immediate comprehension: there is no unintentional incest or parricide. Moreover, whereas Oedipus incorrectly suspects conspiracy, Anderton is in fact being framed. He incorrectly identifies the author of the plot, but the plot is nevertheless real. While rejecting the dominant tragic pattern of Sophocles' play, however, the film preserves some of the Sophoclean lesson in humility. Once a blind believer in the infallibility of the pre-crime system, Anderton ultimately perceives the system's flaws as well as his own limitations as an agent of the law and as a human being.

Several witty allusions to notorious elements of the Oedipus myth offer a self-conscious commentary on the film's engagement with Sophoclean themes. The room in which the pre-cogs see the future is playfully referred to as the 'temple', the pre-cogs themselves as the 'oracles', and the pre-crime police as the 'priests'. The woman who first discovered the pre-cogs' prophetic ability and who refers to herself as the project's 'mother' gives Anderton an unexpected and inappropriate kiss. And the founder of pre-crime, who dies when Anderton's investigation exposes his crimes, maintains a paternal relationship with Anderton, referring to him as 'son' just prior to his death. More recognizable than these faint echoes of patricide and incest is the film's Sophoclean preoccupation with sight and blindness.

Teiresias makes a brief appearance as an eyeless drug-dealer who knows more than he should. And though not permanently blinded, Anderton undergoes a comically gruesome eye transplant to disguise his identity. The allusions constitute a quiet tribute to Sophocles' treatment of sight and blindness, free will and destiny. But the comic mode in which the allusions operate seems to acknowledge the emotional and philosophical incongruities ultimately dividing Spielberg's deeply heartening film-making from the tragic vision of Sophocles' drama.

Martin Scorsese's 2010 film *Shutter Island*, based on a 2003 novel by Dennis Lehane, is another distant descendant of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. No overt allusions link the film with Sophocles' play, but it replicates the same dramatic pattern of painful self-discovery and ends with a compelling psychological twist on the traditional tale. U.S. Marshall Teddy Daniels travels to an isolated hospital for the criminally insane to investigate the disappearance of inmate Rachel Solando, incarcerated for murdering her three children. The dogged investigator proceeds to uncover a vast conspiracy at the institution, finding everywhere traces of secret experimentation terrorizing the patients, but we eventually realize that Daniels himself is in reality a delusional patient at the psychiatric hospital, desperately attempting to mask his own crimes with his paranoid suspicions of conspiracy. He is former Marshall Andrew Laeddis (anagram of Edward Daniels), who murdered his mentally-ill wife Doloris Chanal (anagram of Rachel Solando) after she murdered their three children. Unwilling to acknowledge his crimes directly, yet unable to ignore them completely, he has repressed the painful memories and adopted a new but familiar identity. The medical staff on the island allows him to play out his investigative fantasy in the hope of curing him, and Daniels eventually succeeds in rediscovering his real self, only to shrink from the truth once again and withdraw into his fantasy. He is thus an incomplete reincarnation of Oedipus. Both are intelligent investigators who ironically investigate their own crimes. Like Oedipus' search for the murderer of Laius, Laeddis' investigation leads him to the traumatic discovery of his own unforgiveable offenses against his family. And both men suffer horribly from the pain of self-recognition. But whereas Oedipus shields himself from his crimes by blinding himself physically, Daniels denies reality by blinding himself psychologically. As the movie closes, when reminded that, if not cured, he must undergo a lobotomy, he nevertheless prefers to 'die as a good man' rather than 'live as a monster,' perhaps a telling allusion to Oedipus.¹⁴ Unable to emulate

¹⁴ Lehane's novel lacks this surprisingly candid line. The suggestion that Teddy is at some

Oedipus' self-acknowledgment and heroic endurance, Oedipus' choice to live as a monster, Teddy chooses instead a kind of psychological suicide. Most viewers will more easily perceive this film's affinities with *film noir*, Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, and several recent psychological thrillers that jolt their audiences by unmasking their characters' delusions. But *Oedipus Tyrannus*, fashioned by Freud into the archetype of repression and a potential model for psychological healing, has left an undeniable mark on the work, and has cast its shadow more widely over the genres of criminal and psychological fiction than is often recognized.

Though emulated much less regularly than *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Oedipus at Colonus* too has enjoyed some noteworthy modern reincarnations. The title character of T.S. Eliot's *Elder Statesman* (1958/1959) is a sadly diluted version of Sophocles' aging Oedipus, one who has not yet been forced to recognize his true self or endure years of exile. Recently retired from a respectable but unremarkable career in politics and business, Lord Claverton withdraws to a country convalescent home to regain his health after a stroke. His dutiful and loving daughter Monica—his Antigone—accompanies him in this exile from public life. Badgley Court becomes his grove of the Eumenides, the place where he will soon end his life, but only after he confronts the unpleasant indiscretions of his youth. Chief among these indiscretions is a driving accident faintly reminiscent of Oedipus' encounter with Laius at the crossroads: Lord Claverton struck a pedestrian and fled the scene without reporting the crime. Claverton's driving accident is a significantly deflated version of Oedipus' pivotal crossroads encounter, deflated even further when we learn that Claverton's supposed victim was already dead before being hit. But with it Eliot subtly invokes Sophocles' treatment of moral guilt in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Though he confesses to the *de facto* murder of Laius, the incestuous son and outcast, Oedipus insists that he is morally innocent of parricide and incest, as he did what he did unknowingly, without volition. Creon, not Oedipus, is a true villain, a man who speaks impieties openly and commits violent acts of injustice knowingly. And Polyneices and Eteocles are true parricides, sons who have intentionally cast their father aside (cf. Soph. *OC* 281–288 and 1110–1153). Oedipus, cursed yet sacred, rejects the condemnation of his enemies and maintains that he is righteous and unjustly persecuted. Lord Claverton, by contrast, must acknowledge and confess his moral failings despite the technical loopholes. Legally, he cannot be charged

level aware of his repression surfaces instead when he says, 'Maybe there are some things we were put on this earth *not* to know' (Lehane 2003, 325).

with criminally negligent manslaughter, as the man was already dead when struck and abandoned. Morally, however, he has sinned grievously; believing himself to have injured a pedestrian, he knowingly fled the scene and failed to render aid to preserve his reputation. Lord Claverton eventually achieves redemption not through a steadfast assertion of innocence and righteousness, but through a confession of his sinfulness. Rejecting, it seems, the intransigent Sophoclean hero whose righteous indignation gives supernatural power to his horrific curses, Eliot replaces him with a Christian penitent. The modern playwright performs similar reductive surgeries on Polyneices and Antigone. When Claverton denies his son's request for financial support, Michael allies himself with the play's Creon figure and embarks on a new career in South America. Claverton's daughter Monica looks forward to a life of wedded happiness with her fiancé Charles.¹⁵ In short, Eliot's play seems less an interactive engagement with Sophocles than a systematic Christian repudiation of Sophoclean heroism. It is perhaps symptomatic of a pervasive unwillingness of the modern world to receive Oedipus' polluted body within its borders and to accept him for what he is.

The Gospel at Colonus (1983), the collaborative creation of writer Lee Breuer and composer Bob Telson, is a much more overtly Christianizing appropriation of Sophocles' play, drawing on gospel music and African-American Pentecostal preaching to retell the story of Oedipus' final days.¹⁶ A preacher-narrator guides us through the story, reading and expounding on the 'scripture' with an inspirational voice. The principal singers dramatize the story with a series of soulful gospel performances. And an accompanying chorus and extended congregation create an atmosphere of communal involvement. For the majority of the performance, Breuer follows Sophocles' plot closely while freely adapting the language (e.g. he quotes *Antigone's* 'Ode to Man'). The gospel sounds, meanwhile, powerfully communicate both Oedipus' anguish and the mixture of horror and compassion he evokes from those around him. This juxtaposition of Greek tragic performance and gospel service has the potential to evoke tragedy's roots in ancient religious ritual, but in practice the Christian elements of the production overshadow the classical origins. Opera, largely independent from ecclesiastical musical traditions, might have more readily adopted this classical myth together with its religious perplexities, but the

¹⁵ See Moody (1994²) 283–285 on the autobiographical significance of this relationship for Eliot, and on the poet's departure here from his former views on love.

¹⁶ On *The Gospel at Colonus*, see especially Goff/Simpson (2007).

combination of gospel music and church environment in *The Gospel at Colonus* illuminates the Greek myth with a distinctly Christian radiance. Moreover, Breuer unambiguously extends the Christianizing elements into the story itself, most notably in his updated conclusion, where Oedipus is miraculously redeemed and resurrected through divine grace.¹⁷ It is by no means obvious that Sophocles' original Oedipus has any desire for grace as such, and yet it does not require a great stretch of the imagination to view the suffering hero of Greek myth alongside the Biblical Job, another peripheral Christian appropriation, and to allow him final reconciliation with his creator. Furthermore, while it is debatable to what extent *The Gospel at Colonus* allegorizes African American experience and comments on racial injustices, it should not be forgotten that the themes of salvation and reconciliation carry significant political resonance when allied with the distinctly African American contribution to this artwork.¹⁸ The promise of salvation after such incomprehensible suffering makes good sense both emotionally and politically and the uplifting music that concludes the production seals Oedipus' transformation with a celebration of the good news.

It is easy to read Jean Anouilh's *Antigone*, first produced in 1944 in Nazi-occupied Paris, as a condemnation of the French collaboration, represented by Creon, and a tribute to the resistance, embodied by Antigone. But Anouilh's play also offers a more pervasive elegy over the wounds World War II inflicted on Europe and on the devastating effects of brutality on the human spirit. The greatly expanded *agon* between Créon and Antigone extends the Sophoclean conflict between state and family, human and divine law, into a clash of two all-consuming life philosophies, in which the experienced realist attempts to disillusion the naïve romantic. At the same time, Anouilh lends the proponents of these conflicting visions individuality and psychological depth, removing the argument from the public sphere and allowing them to speak with greater candour. Still the loyal sister and defiant subject, Antigone becomes a more abstract idealist in Anouilh, a free and creative spirit, filled with childish wonder and joy, alive despite the emotional scars of her family's history. She loves Haemon with a romantic adolescent passion, and she loves being the object of his chivalrous devotion. She is the artist who cannot compromise her artistic vision, the dreamer who cannot live in a world where dreams cannot be made reality.

¹⁷ See Goff/Simpson (2007) 185–197.

¹⁸ See Goff/Simpson (2007) 178–185 and 207–218.

Créon remains an autocratic ruler, but whereas Sophocles' character must be crushed by the realization of his personal calamity at the play's close, Anouilh's Creon is broken well before his play begins. Age and experience have hardened him into an emotionless pragmatist, and whatever life he once enjoyed has already exhausted his spirit, leaving him a hollow shell. Antigone firmly believes that her brother's ghost will only rejoin his parents and brother in the underworld if properly interred; but Creon, rather than opposing her religious beliefs with political arguments, can only dismiss them as a child's naïve superstition, fostered by mercenary and hypocritical priests (cf. Creon's condemnation of Teiresias at Soph. *Ant.* 1055). Anouilh's Créon does not privilege his faith in human law above his faith in the divine. He simply has no faith in either. He is not, to be sure, a thoroughly wicked villain. In fact, he attempts to preserve Antigone's life by dissuading her from violating the edict. But his persuasion amounts to an attempt to rob her of her childish dreams and reduce her to a life of stoic complacency—in her view, no life at all. Sophocles had summed up Creon's offence as a perverse transgression of the divinely ordained boundary between the living and the dead: Creon entombs Antigone alive but keeps Polyneices' corpse in the world of the living (see Soph. *Ant.* 1068–1071). Anouilh now refigures that violation in Créon's own body: he exists as a mere corpse among the living, devoid of soul and life.

Like their Sophoclean ancestors, Anouilh's Antigone and Créon are paradigms of intransigence. Nothing can reconcile them. Yet Anouilh expresses a faint hope that a future generation may find some satisfactory middle ground between their opposing ideologies. In confrontation with Créon the fanatical Antigone adamantly rejects a humdrum life of marital happiness with Haemon. She would allow herself to be worshipped as the object of Haemon's obsessive adoration, but she could not bear to imagine their love maturing, or rather degrading, into domestic companionship. As she confronts death, however, she shares the misgivings and self-doubts of her Sophoclean counterpart. She now tries to write a note to Haemon confessing her error, and she voices a poignant lament for the son they never shared ('notre petit garçon', Anouilh 1947, 80). She recognizes with remorse her intemperate indulgence in idealism. Créon is too desensitized to feel guilt or remorse at the play's conclusion. Numb to the deaths of his own son and wife, he simply accepts what has happened and returns to his schedule. But he at least intimates some vague awareness of regret when he tells his young page 'you should never grow up' ('il faudrait ne jamais devenir grand', Anouilh 1947, 84). It is too late for Créon to reform himself, but his young protégé still has a chance to live.

Athol Fugard's *The Island* (1973), produced in collaboration with John Kani and Winston Ntshona, takes place in Robben Island prison during the South African apartheid era, where two inmates, imprisoned for political resistance to the government, plan a performance of *Antigone*.¹⁹ Of particular interest is the play's complex, self-conscious meditation on the personal significance of staging *Antigone* and the function of art as both political and moral inspiration. Cellmates Winston and John plan to adopt the roles of Antigone and Creon in the performance, but their continual fighting during the preparations for the performance refigures instead the dispute between Antigone and Ismene. Winston, who will play Creon in the planned production, adopts the role of Antigone in his interactions with John. He is the creative spirit behind the art, not only determined to make a political statement, but fully absorbed with the preparations, repeatedly pushing John to learn his part while busily recycling old nails and scraps of rope for the costumes. John on the other hand is the reluctant Ismene, who shirks learning his part in the play as an unnecessarily onerous task, like the laborious digging in the quarry. He dismisses the story as a fictional legend, not something real like his prison sentence, thereby denying art as a valid or adequate commentary on life. Moreover, he refuses to play the part of woman, fearing the mockery of the other inmates—a potential echo both of Ismene's protest that, as women, she and Antigone are not naturally suited to fight against men (Soph. *Ant.* 61–62), and of Creon's refusal to be bested by a woman (678–680). This fraternal dynamic shifts once Winston learns that his sentence has been reduced, and John suggests that Winston will soon forget his suffering and move on, devoting himself to the enjoyment of life's pleasures. Winston, we suspect, may not in fact live up to the ideals of the heroic Antigone. With his cellmate's release only three months away, John feels the weight of his own life sentence grow heavier and seems to regret the political activism that confined him to this prison. He now resembles Antigone, lamenting all that she will lose as she goes to her grave, her idealism wavering. John's life sentence is his living death, like the live burial of Antigone. With the performance of *Antigone* in the final act, however, he renews his faith in resistance. John ends his *Antigone*, and *The Island*, by removing his costume and resolutely affirming the validity of his actions with a revised version of Antigone's final words, speaking no longer in her voice but in his own: 'I go now to my living death, because I honoured

¹⁹ On *The Island*, see also Fugard (2002).

those things to which honour belongs' (Fugard 1986, 77; cf. Soph. *Ant.* 943). Fugard's re-enactment of Sophocles thus transforms him from the reluctant Ismene into the bold Antigone and finally into his own resolute self.

Tengiz Abuladze's 1984 film *Repentance*, awarded the Grand Prix at Cannes upon its 1987 release, is a tragic indictment of Stalinist totalitarianism, replaying the conflicts of Sophocles' *Antigone* across two generations and against a rich background of Georgian cultural traditions. Varlam Aravidze, the celebrated former mayor of a Georgian town, dies and is buried, but Katevan Barateli secretly digs up the corpse and returns it to Varlam's house, repeating this violation until she is apprehended. At her trial Katevan narrates the history of persecution her family suffered under Varlam's administration—the film includes extended flashbacks of her childhood—and she vows never to allow the corpse burial; for to honour the dictator thus would be to perpetuate the false memory of his greatness. While Katevan's act of exhumation shockingly reverses Antigone's act of burial—simultaneously an authorial tribute to Sophocles and a declaration of creative independence—Katevan nevertheless closely emulates the Sophoclean heroine in her civil disobedience and her devotion to the memory of her family. The Sophoclean parallels extend also into Katevan's flashback, which restages the opposition between Creon and Antigone in the figures of the dictatorial Varlam and his distant relative Sandro, Katevan's father. Here Abuladze complements the Sophoclean opposition of state and individual with a self-reflexive debate over the functions of art and the artist. Both the Creon-like Varlam and the Antigone-like Sandro are artists of sorts, Varlam an operatic singer and Sandro a painter, but Varlam enslaves art in the service of the state. Art for him can serve only to inspire the uncritical nationalistic devotion of the masses—a corruption evocative of Nazi exploitation of Germanic musical traditions. Sandro, in contrast, refuses to compromise his art by pandering to Varlam's political ambitions. Further dividing the two men are their differing views on the role of religion in the state. While Sandro places faith in God, Varlam advocates instead a Soviet-style confidence in science, and Abuladze symbolizes this spiritual conflict with the physical erection of a scientific laboratory inside the town's historic church, which is eventually demolished by a fiery explosion. Varlam's edicts defile the town's religious heritage just as Creon's edict pollutes the altars of Thebes. Ironically, in eradicating true art together with religion, Varlam has seemingly obliterated any possibility of legitimate repentance and redemption for himself and his family. The Sophoclean conflicts resurface for a final time in the succeeding generations of Varlam's family, now thrown into confusion by Katevan's accusations. Varlam's son Abel has matured from

a young Haemon into an adult Creon, truly his father's son; though increasingly distressed by Varlam's crimes, he nevertheless attempts to 'bury' the insubordinate Katevan alive by having her committed to an asylum. But Abel's own son Tornike assumes Haemon's role in earnest, murdering himself after an impassioned debate with his father. Like Creon's unholy edicts upon Polyneices' corpse, Varlam's brutal violation of Katevan's family, erroneously legitimated as service to the state, ultimately rebounds with devastating severity upon his own family and himself.

Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* (1990) provides a final example of the enduring political resonance of Sophoclean drama.²⁰ While Heaney's play is more translation than free adaptation of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, its initial performance in Derry, amid the sectarian violence plaguing Northern Ireland, inevitably provokes a dialogue between the conflicts within the play and the conflicts surrounding it. And the Sophoclean opposition between resentment and reconciliation audibly echoes the contemporary political struggle between unrelenting violence and peace. Philoctetes' festering wound, both the physical wound in his leg and the emotional wound of his abandonment, evokes the pain and suffering that forever engenders more hatred in war-torn regions. Philoctetes now has a chance to cure his injury, the Chorus insists, if only he can overcome his own hatred: 'Your wound is what you feed on Stop eating yourself up with hate and come with us' (Heaney 1991, 61). In his most notable departure from Sophocles, an authoritative interruption from the Chorus anticipating the climactic intervention of Hercules, Heaney openly addresses the modern conflict. He recognizes the victims of the contemporary violence: 'the innocent in gaols', 'a hunger-striker's father', 'the police widow in veils'. And he acknowledges the inadequacy of his verse, of anyone's verse, to compensate the living for their losses: 'No poem or play or song/ Can fully right a wrong/ Inflicted and endured'. But he exhorts his audience to believe in the possibility of reconciliation: 'Believe in miracles/And cures and healing wells' (Heaney 1991, 77).

At first sight it is potentially disheartening to discover that Heaney has aligned his voice with that of the *deus ex machina*, a mechanical contrivance for theatrical wish-fulfilment. The invocation of this artificial device might be mistaken as an implicit acknowledgment that closure is illusionary, that it can be simulated within the theatre but not materialized in the world outside. This reading, however, fails to appreciate the deeper relevance of

²⁰ On *The Cure at Troy*, see also Heaney (2002) and Taplin (2004).

Heracles and the timeliness of his arrival. Like Philoctetes, this 'divinity' is a paradigm of human suffering, but one who has suffered and achieved much more; for Heracles' heroic endurance led ultimately to his reconciliation with the gods who once tormented him. He arrives on the scene as Philoctetes is about to throw away a precious gift, the ideal opportunity for healing, a chance to assimilate himself with Heracles not only as suffering victim but also as triumphant survivor (cf. Soph. *Phil.* 799–803). He needs only to recognize the opportunity before him. While Heracles authoritatively commands Philoctetes to rejoin the army at Troy, he is also a source of desperately needed illumination for Philoctetes, compelling him to perceive the rightness of the path he must follow. Heaney adopts this optimistic voice of Heracles in the wake of the peaceful revolutions in Eastern Europe and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall.²¹ As a poet in an age of perceived progress, he is inspired to do more than revel in tragic suffering. He cannot teach us precisely how to forge the reconciliation, but he dutifully reminds us not to overlook the golden opportunity when peace is within our grasp.

The wealth of inspiration emanating from the dramas of Sophocles is ultimately inexhaustible. His characters, while monumental and iconic, translate easily into the deeply human figures of modern theatre and film. His words engender not only mottoes and quotations, but enchanting verse and passionate music. Sophoclean plotlines reappear even in the most recent genres of film, and his ideological conflicts are still invoked to shape modern political debates. His many voices are heard repeatedly in the works of modern artists, not just the foreboding voice of Teiresias and the defiant voice of Antigone, but also the rousing voice of Heracles, all manifestations of the creative voice of the poet himself. Cicero's tale of the aging yet miraculously robust Sophocles is apt (*De senectute* 7): when his sons declare him no longer fit to manage his own property, Sophocles proves them wrong by reciting from his latest work, *Oedipus at Colonus*. Though not deified—he would never permit it—Sophocles and his art have passed from the mortal realm into the heroic, transformed into an everlasting source of awe and inspiration.

²¹ Cf. Heaney (2002) 176.

'MEN AS THEY OUGHT TO BE': SOPHOCLES IN TRANSLATION

J. Michael Walton

Translating plays is a different exercise from any other form of literary translation. Translating ancient Greek plays into English presents an additional challenge in finding a link between source and target that will take account of the theatrical conditions for which the play was originally intended and the audience of today. Sophocles wrote in verse for masked actors and a dancing chorus accompanied by music. He created plays for a single performance at a largely parochial religious festival in competition with his contemporaries. He dealt with the social and political concerns of the fifth century BC through the distancing device of malleable myth. Priorities for today's translators may reflect all or any of these factors. They may also take into account that today's reader, and even more today's audience, may want to be guided by dramatic and theatrical elements that do not merely reveal the past, but transcend period and create a link between then and now. Literal translation is unlikely to achieve this, but unrestrained licence may lose sight of the original altogether in favour of the translator's own ego. This basic controversy was neatly identified in 1957 by Theodore Savory when he described the conflict between 'Hellenizers' and 'Modernizers'.¹ This was no new problem, but one which consciously or unconsciously had exercised the first translators of Sophocles into English, and which remains a cogent issue today.

1. *The Early Translations and Translators*

No more than seven of a reputed one hundred and twenty tragedies or satyr plays written by Sophocles survived into the Renaissance in their entirety. Their translation into English, with a single eccentric exception, had to wait until the eighteenth century. Three of the plays, *Antigone*, *Trachiniae*, and *Oedipus Coloneus*, were first published in translation, under these titles, in the two volumes containing all seven 'translated into English prose' by

¹ Savory (1957) 60 and 63.

George Adams in 1729. By this time the other four had already appeared in print. *Ajax* and *Electra* (1714) and *Oedipus, King of Thebes* (1715) were translated by a working playwright, Lewis Theobald. *Philoctetes* (1725) was first brought out in Dublin translated by Thomas Sheridan, grandfather of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, later to be the successful manager of Drury Lane and author of *The Rivals*, *A Trip to Scarborough*, and *The School for Scandal*. All four translations should, and indeed do, exhibit a sense of performance even if there was little chance that they ever received one.

The first, indeed the only seventeenth-century translation of any Greek tragedy, was the *Electra of Sophocles* (1649), a peculiar polemic by 'C.W.', that is, Christopher Wase. It is here that the history proper of Sophocles in English begins. The year, 1649, and the place of publication, The Hague, give a clue to this unusual political document. It does little service to Sophocles but is undeniably a translation of his *Electra* (if a stilted and pedestrian one), in the sense that the episodes and dialogue are exactly patterned on the Greek. But Wase had an agenda. Charles I had been King of England, Ireland, and Scotland since 1625, but after defeat in the Civil War and the establishment of the Commonwealth, was executed in January of 1649 on a specially erected scaffold in Whitehall. Christopher Wase was at the time a royalist Fellow of King's College, Cambridge. Sophocles' *Electra* deals with the revenge of Agamemnon's brother and sister for the death of their father at the hands of their mother Clytaemestra. Wase's dedication of *Electra* to 'her Highnesse, the Lady Elizabeth', the younger daughter of the former king, is couched in such a way as to suggest that she should take Sophocles' play as an example of how she should herself seek vengeance.² There was no way it could be published in England. It proved of little effect anyway. Elizabeth was thirteen at the time, and locked up in Carisbrooke Castle where she died a year later.

The 'Persons of the Enterlude' are listed as:

The *Tutour* and Foster

Orestes, the Prince

Electra, the Princesse Royall

The *Quirr* of Maids of Honour dwelling near the Palace

Chrysotheame, the sister of *Electra*

Clytemnestra, the unnatural Spouse of *Agamemnon* who conspired against him

² See Hall/Macintosh (2005) 164–165 and Hall (1999).

Egist, the paramour of *Clytemnestra* and Conspiratour against the King.

There is some sense of staging for a play never to be staged, introduced by a separate set of Notes on the 'Managing of the Scene ... the Postures and Motions, with the Carriage of the Action'. Wase's comment in the Dedication (p. 2) that 'Plays are the Mirrours wherein Men's Actions are reflected to their own view' is interesting at such an early date for setting up a kind of manifesto which may serve for future generations, both as a justification for the drama of classical Athens and for its translation into other languages. It suggests a pliability in these ancient plays which matches their immediate reference to Athenian society of the fifth century BC with a universality applicable to many another time and culture.

It can hardly be denied that the dramatic effect of Wase's text is betrayed as badly as he felt his King had been, in his case by a deplorable infelicity of expression. The 'Tutour' in the Prologue with Orestes and Pylades, reacts to a sound from the palace with the following:

Methinks, within door, Child, I seemed to heare
One of the maidens keep a groaning there. (4; Sophocles 78–79)

His description of the chariot race shows no improvement in his rhyming verse:

All the Crisean heath did cover'd lie
With shatter'd *limbs* of his *shipwrackt* Chivalry.
This he of *Athens* shrowd at's reins espies (28; Sophocles 729–733)
But when the ring behind the sweet youth slide
Down from the box, with a shrill shriek they cri'd. (29; Sophocles 745–747)

Wase's *Electra* is a poor start to the 350 translations of Sophocles which have been published since 1649, but it does serve to demonstrate how Greek tragedy in translation, and especially the plays of Sophocles, may come to reflect as much the period of the translator as the time of Pericles.

There is a debate here, in which a number of scholars and playwrights had already engaged, about the nature and definition of translation, and especially the translation of dramatic work both for a reading and a playgoing public.³ It is a debate which shows no sign of cooling down. One of the earliest English theorists about translation was the poet laureate John Dryden who famously wrote 'For this last half year I have been troubled with the

³ See especially Alexander Fraser Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee (1790).

disease (as I may call it) of translation'.⁴ At the time he was translating from Latin—Virgil, Lucretius, Theocritus, and Horace—and was to go on to write several essays on translation issues including the substantial 'Of Dramatic Poesy: an Essay' (1668), 'A Defence of "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy"' (1668); and 'To the Earl of Roscommon, on his Essay on Translated Verse' (1684). In 1678 he produced an *Oedipus*, written in collaboration with Nathaniel Lee. Their *Oedipus a Tragedy* was first performed at the Dorset Garden Theatre with Thomas Betterton in the title role and Mrs Betterton as Jocasta.

Whether or not Dryden and Lee's play can be classified as a 'translation' of Sophocles is not even a moot point. There would be a better case for suggesting it is a translation from Corneille, the first three characters to appear being Alcander, Diocles, and Pyracmon (all borrowed from Corneille). Adrastus, Haemon, Phorbas, Diocles, Eurydice, and Aegeon duly follow, none of them with a Sophoclean precedent. The play owes everything to Restoration Tragedy. In a night of thunder, 'shooting Stars' and 'Chaos' (Act II sc. 1) the truth is revealed by a series of 'Prodigies'. There is a Senecan necromancy scene with the Ghost of Laius and nine deaths in the final four pages.⁵

The point is—and this is significant in the history of Greek tragedy in English—that Dryden was himself a translator from Greek as well as Latin, and a playwright with a shrewd sense of what the Restoration audience wanted. When he and Nathaniel Lee decided to embark on their *Oedipus* Dryden knew his Sophocles well enough to write in the Preface to the printed edition:

... that Oedipus was the most celebrated piece of all Antiquity: That Sophocles, not only the greatest Wit, but one of the greatest Men in Athens, made it for the Stage at the Publick Cost, and that it had the Reputation of being his Masterpiece, not only among the Seven of his which are still remaining, but of the greater Number which are perish'd.⁶

Dryden would have been quite capable of translating Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, had he seen any point in so doing, and submitting it for public performance, had he felt the public could have put up with it. In 1679 when the Dryden and Lee play was printed there was no translation of Sophocles'

⁴ Dryden (1685) 161.

⁵ See Hall/Macintosh (2005) 17–24, who point out that Lee was probably responsible for Acts IV and V, including the bloodbath; and the Introduction to the translation of *Oedipus Tyrannus* by Richard Jebb (1887) xxxiii–xlv.

⁶ John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee, *Oedipus a Tragedy* in Roper (1985) 115.

Oedipus Tyrannus in English and not the slightest chance of Sophocles featuring in a professional production. Thirty years later when Theobald's translations became available, there was still no suggestion that they might be for the public stage rather than the private library.

Theobald (pronounced 'Tibbald') was brought up in the house of his godfather Baron Rockingham after the death of his father when he was only two. Though he embarked on a legal career, before he was twenty he had had a play successfully performed, and repeated, at Drury Lane. He was later to join John Rich's theatre at Lincoln's Inn Fields and become a leader in the movement for a 'proper' text of Shakespeare, whose works appeared from the Restoration onwards in often barely recognizable adaptations. In 1713 the twenty-five year old Theobald apparently entered into an agreement with the publisher Bernard Lintott to translate the whole of Aeschylus, as well as some Homer and Horace, and several plays of Sophocles. In the two years from 1714–1715 there appeared in print, attributed to Theobald, a number of translations of Greek plays, the three tragedies of Sophocles and also two comedies of Aristophanes.⁷ *Ajax* (1714) which may have been a collaboration with another playwright, Nicholas Rowe, contains a Preface from Lintott in which he states:

I have by me the Tragedies of *Aeschylus*, *Sophocles* and *Euripides*, Translated into *English* blank Verse; they are all, as I have been assur'd by several Gentlemen of allow'd Judgment in these Matters, very exactly done from the *Greek* I have given the publick the *AJAX* of *SOPHOCLES* as a Specimen of my Undertaking. If they think fit to encourage it, I intend to give 'em one every Month, till I have gone thro' all the *Greek* Tragedies.⁸ (A3r–A4r)

What happened to the rest of the agreement seems to have been what happens to many a publishing venture when good intentions are overtaken by commercial pressure. Lintott's ambition to provide translations from a successful playwright of all extant Sophocles and Aeschylus fell by the wayside.⁹

Theobald may have intended to translate the whole of Sophocles if *Philoctetes*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Trachiniae* were also contracted from Lintott, but it was George Adams who first published all seven plays, in two volumes in 1729, with a lengthy Preface and a dedication to William, Duke of Manchester. Adams offers extended footnotes and adequate stage

⁷ *Clouds* and *Wealth* (1715), both for Jonas Brown.

⁸ See Jones (1919) 6–7 and Walton (2009).

⁹ See also Hall/Macintosh (2005).

directions, apart from the setting up of the suicide of Ajax in a forest, rather than on the seashore. Unfortunately, his text is prosy stuff, especially in the choruses, and lacks any of Theobald's dramatic awareness.

Thomas Francklin in 1759 was to go to the other extreme with a verse translation, handicapped, if not hamstrung, by the imposition of a notional rhyming pattern on the choruses leading, in consecutive couplets of *Antigone*, to 'known' rhyming with 'son', 'Jove' with 'love' and 'strewed' with 'flood'. Francklin clearly appealed to the taste for a heightened language of his and subsequent times with a series of reprints as late as 1886. These may have been in part a reaction to the complete works of Sophocles by Robert Potter (1788), his latest and least convincing work on the Greek tragedians, and the much-revised Oxford edition whose anonymous translator was well advised to remain so, and has so far still evaded identification.¹⁰

Lewis Campbell and Edward Coleridge proved significant translators of the entire works in the latter years of the nineteenth century, but both were eclipsed by the critical approach of the mighty Richard Jebb, whose weighty three volumes of commentary and translation have affected, if not dominated, Sophoclean scholarship ever since. Jebb, coinciding as he did with the rebirth of Greek tragedy in performance, was the first to offer a major stage history of the Athenian tragedians in what we might now call the area of 'reception'. His own somewhat literal readings of the staging process (as in a naturalistic identification in the Tutor's description of Argos, during the opening scene of *Electra*, of setting with the actual theatre of Dionysus in fifth-century BC Athens) no longer convince, but his illumination of the broad influence of Sophocles as one of the founders of European theatre cannot be challenged.¹¹ Together with Gilbert Murray, though less for Sophocles in Murray's case than in his translations of Euripides, these two classical heavyweights created a bridge to the modern era of translating the Greeks for performance.

2. *Text in Context*

Finding a dramatic language in English for Sophocles has always proved a challenge, often compounded by the unavoidable need for 'equivalence', to use a term favoured by translators and translation theorists. There is

¹⁰ For an extensive list of translations, see the Appendix to Walton (2006a).

¹¹ Jebb (1883). Editions of individual plays were subsequently published or revised by Jebb at regular intervals.

a thematic and theatrical range within the seven surviving Sophoclean tragedies; there are conflicting moral issues and contradictions as well. Writing some seventy years after the death of Sophocles in 405 BC, Aristotle suggested in his *Poetics* that Sophocles was the greatest of all the Athenian tragedians, an innovator in theatrical technique and an imitator (μιμητής) in the mould of Homer.¹² He quoted Sophocles as saying that 'he portrayed men as they ought to be [or 'as they ought to be portrayed'—not quite the same thing], Euripides as they are'.¹³ Plato, Phrynichus the comedian, and Aristotle elsewhere, all represented Sophocles as a placid figure, at least in old age, comfortable and relatively content. From such an assessment of his personality grew up the popular view of the tragedian, especially within Victorian neoclassicism, as someone whose plays were the perfect examples, not only of men as they ought to be, but of tragedy as it ought to be, sublime, detached, and even passionless.

A comment on Sophocles in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (405 BC) seems to reinforce this impression. When Dionysus consults Heracles about visiting Hades to bring back Euripides and the hero asks why he would not prefer to resurrect Sophocles, the god of the theatre replies 'I want to see how his son manages, and anyway, Sophocles was εὐκολος up here and he'll be εὐκολος down there too' (79–82). Εὐκολος literally means 'having a good digestion', hence 'amiable' or 'easy-going'. A comedy, particularly an Aristophanic comedy, may not be the best source of reliable information about any major figure of the fifth century BC, be he politician, soldier, philosopher or fellow-playwright. Aristophanes might also have needed to find an excuse to rule out Sophocles, who was alive when he started to write the play, but died while it was in rehearsal. Sophocles at any rate came to represent in tragedy an Athens of harmony and proportion, equivalent, as Richard Jenkyns has suggested, to the architecture of the Parthenon or the statuary of Pheidias.¹⁴ Forgotten was the fact that Sophocles was a soldier, elected General (possibly twice) and a member of a healing cult; and that he may have flourished throughout the glorious decades of Athenian supremacy, both military and cultural, but that he also lived his final years in a battered Athens hurtling to destruction, a whole generation of young men virtually eradicated. The last thing a translator needs to suggest about Sophocles is that he was above and beyond the realities of living and dying. There is nothing bland or romantic in these seven plays, either physically or ethically.

¹² Arist. *Poet.* 1448a26.

¹³ Arist. *Poet.* 1460b35–36.

¹⁴ Jenkyns (1980) esp. 60–111.

Much of the impetus of Sophoclean drama resides in the sheer fallibility of the human body and the human mind. His was a world of almost constant warfare and limited medical resources. Death and corporeal inadequacy inhabit all his seven surviving plays, from the madness of Ajax to the gangrenous foot of Philoctetes. Oedipus was maimed when exposed as a baby. Heracles, the strongest man who ever lived, appears in agony on a stretcher. Out of nine deaths within the action, six are suicides, and there would be another if Heracles in *Trachiniae* could only muster the strength to kill himself instead of trying vainly to persuade his son do the job for him. Choruses reflect on the misery of the human condition. Their betters indulge, or have indulged in, parricide, matricide, fratricide, and whatever term one might use to describe the killing of a niece, a stepfather or a lot of sheep and cattle which, in his derangement, Ajax believes are his comrades-in-arms. There is incest and mutilation. Sophocles' plays are steeped in physical and mental decay. The challenge for the translator of Sophocles has less to do with identifying a stoic language of heroism, than finding enough terms for suffering.

If anguish provides the context for Sophocles, the dramatic situation is often built around the very human causes and justifications for a particular course of action. Though the characters of Aeschylus make their own decisions, there is usually a sense that they are barely, if at all, in control of their own lives. Sophocles' characters, by contrast, have to face some level of personal responsibility, including Oedipus whose crimes may be unwitting but are the result of, and which result in, a programme of cardinal errors of judgement past and present by all sorts of people, from defiance of oracles to refusal to follow orders, to lying to save face. In all of this, language becomes a flexible tool to justify the attitudes of characters such as Lichas (*Trachiniae*), Clytaemestra (*Electra*), Polyneices (*Oedipus at Colonus*), Menelaus (*Ajax*), Odysseus (*Philoctetes*), or Creon (*Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*). Often in Sophocles simple words such as καλός, φίλος and φίλια, νόμος, ὅσιος, σοφός, δίκη and δίκαιος, γενναῖος, φρονεῖν, ἄμαρτία or τιμή turn out to have shades of meaning which can be manipulated to suit an argument. Καλός can be both more and less than 'fine' or 'beautiful'; φίλος and φίλια than 'loving' and 'friendship'; νόμος than 'law' or 'custom'; ὅσιος than 'devout' or 'sanctioned by natural law'; σοφός than 'wise' or 'clever'; δίκαιος/δίκη than 'appropriate' and 'justice'; γενναῖος than 'noble' or 'genuine'; φρονεῖν than 'to intend' or 'to support'; ἄμαρτία than 'failure of judgement' or 'mistake'; τιμή than 'distinction' or 'respect'.

Here is a twin challenge to the translator, both in finding a range of vocal expression for what is virtually beyond words, and of hitting upon an English equivalent, sometimes more than one, for a single Greek term

to accommodate the manner in which the speaker is playing upon the breadth or ambiguity of the original. If this may be true to some extent of any translation from ancient Greek, of poetry, oratory or even history, in translating dramatic material there is always the additional dimension of performance to allow for, where the stage action may confirm or contradict what is being said, and the inflection may depend upon the character either of the speaker or his immediate audience, or indeed the theatre audience with a different overall perception to that of those onstage.

It is to issues like these which we may now turn, not in the hope of coming up with a formula for the translator of Sophocles, nor even making judgements on the 'best' translations. Translators are unwise to do that, their only reason for undertaking a new version of the original being a conviction that their own will be superior to anything previous. Translation of a stage play is an imprecise and imperfect art, the most important aspect of which is that it will speak to its new readership or audience with as much of the impact of the source as is possible for the target. As well as being the source, Sophocles is, paradoxically, also partly the target, because a dramatic piece is not fixed and static. Its mobility is essential to its survival and has proved so in every age from when Euripides was first translated into the English language.¹⁵ In other words, there is nothing wrong with a translation of a Greek tragedy reflecting the concerns and attitudes of the likely readership; few indeed are the translations which merit a shelf-life of more than a generation. Sophocles' original stays the same, with due allowance for the marginal textual emendation. Modern languages develop and change, in our current world at an alarmingly increasing pace. Were there some correlation between the Greek of Periclean Athens and the English language of the fifth century BC a case might be made for a definitive translation of a Greek play in language current at that time, but languages with such a pedigree are few and far between, none with such a tradition of performance as the Greek; and certainly not English.

3. *Words and Concepts*

As suggested above, many of the questions relating to translating Sophocles come down to single words whose meaning in the original may be complex, even contradictory. Often the approach to concepts marks out one translation from another. An example can be taken from the two early versions of

¹⁵ See Walton (2006a) esp. 26–42.

Electra. A single brief passage of the Chorus (containing the genitive form of δίκη, one of the ‘ambiguous’ words identified above), will be sufficient to show the difference between Wase’s *Electra* and that of Theobald sixty-five years later. It comes from the scene when Orestes returns with Pylades after the murder of Clytaemestra, but before Aegisthus makes his entrance, still believing that Orestes has been killed in a chariot race. Electra welcomes her brother and urges him to return indoors, when Aegisthus is spotted heading for the palace. The Chorus intervene with a brief lyric comment:

CHORUS: δι’ ὧτ’ ὅς ἂν παύρ’ αἴ’ ὧς
 ἢ πῶς ἐννέπειν
 πρὸς ἄνδρα τόνδε συμφέροι, λαθραίων ὧς
 ὁρούσῃ
 πρὸς δίκας ἀγῶνα. (Sophocles, *Electra* 1437–1441)

Christopher Wase (1649).

Twere best a while picquere,¹⁶
 And buzze into his ear
 Some *idle* tale, and play the fish, that so
 He *unawares* may rush as judgements blow (51)

Lewis Theobald (1714).

Twere fit a while we entertain the Tyrant
 With courteous Accents and Dissembled Meekness;
 To win him on, and sooth him into Ruine. (Act V, sc. 2, 40–42)

The passage is not an easy one for the translator, as demonstrated by the following selection from the other fifty or so translations of Sophocles’ *Electra* to have appeared in print since those of Wase and Theobald:

George Adams (1729).

It were very convenient that we speak a few mild Words in this Man’s Ear to deceive him, who while he suspects no Ill, falls into the Punishment which the Goddess of Vengeance prepares for him. (Vol. 1, p. 156)

Charlotte Lennox (1759, from the French of Father Brumoy).

Deceive the victim, princess, by some probable discourse, that he may fall more easily into the snare which the Goddess of Vengeance has prepared for him. (Vol. 1, p. 154)

¹⁶ Picquere. A rare word found in Samuel Butler’s *Hudibras*, meaning to ‘flirt’ or ‘engage in banter with’.

Robert Potter (1788).

What here th' occasion calls for, be my care.
This man, then—twere well to sooth his ear
With a few gentle words, that he may rush
Without a thought on their avenging swords. (1474–1477)

Anon, The Oxford Translation (1823, revised by Theodore Alois Buckley for the Bohn edition, 1849).

It would be useful to whisper a few words at least as mildly as possible to this man in his ear, that headlong he may rush into the covert strife of vengeance. (1437–1441)

Lewis Campbell (1873).

Few words, as if in gentleness, twere good
To utter in his ear.
That eager and unaware.
One step may launch him on the field of blood. (1437–1441)

Sir Richard Jebb (1883).

'Twere well to soothe his ear with some few words of seeming gentleness, that he may rush blindly upon the struggle with his doom. (1437–1441)

E.D.A. Morshead (1895).

It were wise to gloze something softly into this man's ear, that he may rush unawares into the wrestle with his rightful doom.¹⁷ (p. 60)

E.F. Watling (1953).

You must give him a friendly greeting
To lure him unsuspecting
To his reckoning with justice. (p. 114)

H.D.F. Kitto (1962).

(*sings*) Speak some gentle words to him
That he may fall unawares
Into the retribution that awaits him. (1439–1441)

¹⁷ Morshead's 'gloze' is an archaic coinage, though possibly was not so to Morshead. So eccentric was his diction and vocabulary that a few of his sparkier pupils at Winchester, to whom he was known as 'Mushri', composed and published a special dictionary; see Stray (1996).

Kenneth McLeish (1990).

Honey his ears with words
To welcome a royal king;
Let him suspect nothing
Till Justice's trap is sprung. (1438–1441)

Hugh Lloyd-Jones (1994a).

It would be well to utter in his ear a few gentle words, so that he may rush
into the hidden ordeal Justice has ready for him. (1438–1441)

Frank McGuinness (A 'new version', 1997).

Speak gently to him.
Let him walk blindly into the trap of Justice. (p. 62)

Jenny March (1998).

It would be as well to speak a few words in his ear with feigned
gentleness, so that he will rush unsuspecting into the ordeal to which
justice brings him. (1438–1441)

Michael Ewans (2000a).

1 Woman: It would be best
to slip some gentle words
into his ear, so he may rush
into the hidden trap of Justice. (1438–1441)

Paul Roche (2001).

Tell him something reassuring
Inducing him to hurtle blindfold
Into the hidden trap and tussle with his doom. (p. 102)

Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton (2004).

A quiet word or two in his ear
Would not go amiss.
Win him over
And trick him into Justice's trap. (p. 62)

Even such an uncontroversial passage, which serves dramatically to cover the exit of Orestes and Pylades into the palace, followed by the immediate arrival of Aegisthus, raises a host of translation issues, which could occupy the whole of the rest of this chapter: verse or prose, literal or figurative, style, assonance, heightened language or clarity, stage directions, the unspoken and the unspeakable, the purpose of translation, and the difference between written and performance text.

How much difference does it make to capitalize 'Justice', as do several of the more recent, while others offer a lower case 'justice' and some of the earlier translations a variation on 'vengeance': all for the Greek δίκη? As the aim here is to concentrate on Sophocles and his seven plays, examples are important to point up the difference between the preoccupations and preferences dictated, not so much by the text of Sophocles and the time when he was creating his plays, as by the period in which the translation was published; a commentary, perhaps, on the theatre of that time, the morals, the theological, political, and social priorities of the translators.

One noteworthy exchange within the text manages to encompass both Sophocles' approach to the Electra story, so different to that of Aeschylus or Euripides, and how it may be viewed in other periods. Only a dozen lines before the comments of the Chorus, variously translated above, the issue of matricide is raised, the major theme of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and a central issue of Euripides' *Electra*. When the Orestes of Sophocles emerges from the palace having executed his mother, he has the following brief exchange with his sister:

ELECTRA: Ὅρεστα, πῶς κυρεῖ τάδ';
 ORESTES: ἐν δόμοισι μὲν
 καλῶς, Ἀπόλλων εἰ καλῶς ἐθέσπισεν. (1424–1425)

As already noted, καλός, is one of those flexible words which has many positive, or implied positive, nuances as the situation requires. Καλῶς is the adverb, often used in reply to a question, and as accommodating as the speaker chooses to make it. Electra asks her brother how things have turned out. He replies καλῶς, as long as Apollo prophesied καλῶς. Here is how a selection of the above translators handle this delicate moment which appears to dismiss matricide as something of minor importance, as long as it has been sanctioned by the god. All show some appreciation of the implications of the exchange.

<i>Wase.</i>	EL:	How are things carry'd?
	OR:	Things within are wrought Well, if Apollo's wisdom (sic) well hath taught.
<i>Theobald.</i>	EL:	Speak, my Orestes, how succeeds our Cause?
	OR:	All's well within. Unless the God deceive:
<i>Lennox.</i>	EL:	Well, brother----
	OR:	All's secure within the palace, if the Oracle of Apollo does not deceive us.
<i>Morshead.</i>	EL:	Orestes, how have ye fared?
	OR:	What is done there within is well done, if 'twas well counselled by Apollo.

<i>Watling</i> (1953).	EL: All right? OR: All right ... if Apollo was right.
<i>McLeish</i> .	EL: Orestes ... OR: It's alright. Inside, it is alright, If Apollo's prophecy is kept.
<i>Roche</i> (2001).	EL: Orestes, how did you do? OR: It all went well in the palace. The prophecy Apollo made has been fulfilled.
<i>McDonald and Walton</i> .	EL: Orestes, how did it go? OR: In the palace all is well, If Apollo prophesied well.

Most of the above translations choose to repeat the word *καλῶς*, in some way, and it is surely fundamental to Orestes' response.¹⁸

4. *The Translation of Suffering*

The American poet Anne Carson has drawn attention to the manner in which Greek playwrights highlighted 'outbursts of sound', notably in connection with Sophocles' *Electra*.¹⁹ Two other plays, *Trachiniae* and *Philoctetes*, feature extended scenes where a central character is in extreme pain, Heracles from the effect of the robe imbrued with the poisoned blood of Nessus, Philoctetes from the festering wound on his foot. Heracles is carried in on a litter and is in agony for the remaining 300 lines of the play. Sophocles establishes the extent of his wretchedness in Heracles' opening speeches, responding in lyrics to the iambics of Hyllus and the Old Man. The second of these speeches runs as follows:

(Ξ Ξ.)
ὦ παῖ, ποῦ ποτ' εἶ;
τῶδέ με τῶδέ με
πρόσλαβε κουφίσας.
Ξ Ξ, ἰὼ δαίμον.
θρόσκει δ' αὖ, θρόσκει δειλαία
διολοῦσ' ἡμᾶς
ἀποτίβαστος ἀγρία νόσος.

¹⁸ Similar exercises could be applied to various passages from any of the plays. For some comparisons from *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, see Walton (2006a) 85–105 and (2008) 161–163.

¹⁹ Carson (1996) 5–11.

ἰὼ ἰὼ Παλλὰς, τόδε μ' αὖ λωβᾶται. ἰὼ παῖ,
 τὸν φύτορ' οἰκτίρας, ἀνεπίφθονον εἶρυσον
 ἔγχος,
 παῖσον ἐμᾶς ὑπὸ κληδός· ἀκοῦ δ' ἄχος, ᾧ μ'
 ἐχόλωσεν
 σὰ μάτηρ ἄθεος, τὰν ᾧδ' ἐπίδοιμι πεσοῦσαν
 αὐτῶς, ᾧδ' αὐτῶς, ὥς μ' ὤλεσαν. ᾧ γλυκὺς
 "Αἰδας,
 (ἔ. ἔ.)
 ᾧ Διὸς αὐθαίμων, εὖνασον εὖνασον μ'
 ὠκυπέτῃ μόρῳ τὸν μέλεον φθίσας.

(1023–1043)

This has the quality of an operatic aria, mixing physical distress with pleas for relief and invective aimed at the perceived cause of his anguish. For the translator without the screen of music such speeches are tricky. Jebb's dense prose (1883) is not helpful here:

O my son, where are you? Raise me, take hold of me—so, so! Alas my destiny! Again, again the cruel pest [δαίμων] leaps forth to rend me, the fierce plague with which none may cope! O Pallas, Pallas, it tortures me again! Alas, my son, pity your father—draw a blameless sword and strike beneath my collarbone and heal this pain with which your godless mother has made me wild! So may I see her fall, exactly as she has destroyed me! Sweet Hades, brother of Zeus, give me rest, give me rest, end my woe by a swift doom.

Watling's verse translation of the passage (1953) is milder but more palatable at this remove in time:

Where are you, my son?
 Hold me, here ... here ... and lift me up ...
 Oh God!
 The foul fiend [δαίμων] grips me again ...
 He will have my life—
 There is no help against him.
 O Pallas, Pallas, I am in torment! O my son,
 For pity's sake, your sword—in just mercy, strike
 Over my heart, here, and put an end to the pain
 That galls my flesh. And let me see the same swift death:
 Punish your mother for this impious thing she has done.
 Sweet Death, brother of God, send me to sleep, to sleep,
 And end this misery in one sharp stroke of doom.

(pp. 152–153)

For most of the rest of the scene Heracles speaks of his suffering and feels despair, resorting to expressions of pain with no literal meaning, *'iou, iou ... oimoi'* or the repeated *'aiai, ô talas, aiai'* of a cry of pain (1081–1082). Adams, the first translator of the play, chose to ignore the expressions of pain altogether; Lennox to jump through the entire early part of the scene

without translating any of it, cutting to the request to Hyllus to kill his father. More recent translators have tried not to shirk the implications of these ‘noises’ and the demands on a modern actor in the role: ‘Ah, o god! ... Ah, it’s burning’ (Ewans); ‘*E! E!, Ioooooooo ... Aiiiiiuiiiiii!*’ (Mueller/Krajewska-Wieczorek 2000a). The latter simply transliterate when Sophocles reaches beyond coherent speech, a solution undertaken elsewhere on a regular basis by McLeish, as well as by McDonald and Walton.

Trachiniae is believed to have been an early play (though even that probably means that Sophocles was over fifty when he wrote it). *Philoctetes* (409 BC), on the other hand, introduces a stage picture from a time when Sophocles may well have been influenced by the more realistic approach of Euripides.²⁰ The scene is set outside a cave by the sea, where newly-washed bandages are seen hanging in the sun to dry. Philoctetes, exiled from human company because of the smell of his infected foot, is onstage continuously from line 219 to the end of the play, his festering wound causing him to faint at one point and hindering his every move. Marooned for nine years, the Greek hero has survived, but only just. His injury is as severe as ever but he has come to treat his pain, as long-term sufferers will, almost as a living entity. When it overwhelms him he responds with a series of screams ‘*a a a a*’, ‘*papai, apappapai, papa, papa, papa, papai*’ and begs Neoptolemus to cut off his foot. Eventually the agony is too much and he faints:

ὦ γαῖα, δέξαι θανάσιμόν μ’ ὅπως ἔχω·
τὸ γὰρ κακὸν τόδ’ οὐκέτ’ ὀρθοῦσθαί μ’ ἔα. (819–820)

Lewis Campbell:

O Earth
I die: receive me to thy breast! This pain
Subdues me utterly: I cannot stand.

R.G. Ussher (1990):

Oh earth, receive me, without delay, in death;
for this pain no longer allows me to stand upright.

Both translations are more staccato than the original, but such ellipsis from the translator may well do a service to the playwright when the stage action signifies more than its verbal expression.

²⁰ By 409 BC they had been rivals at drama festivals, sometimes in direct competition with one another, for nearly fifty years.

The longing for death is familiar enough in Sophocles. During *Philoctetes* the maimed castaway twice threatens suicide. Heracles in *Trachiniae* orders his son Hyllus to dispatch him.²¹ In *Ajax* the disgraced hero falls on his sword, apparently in full view of the audience. His final speech is a soliloquy, the action having moved from outside his tent to the seashore, enabling the Chorus to leave in search of him. Soliloquies are unusual in Greek tragedy, although this is not the only example. A detailed analysis from the translator’s perspective is beyond the scope of the present study, but some points stand out. Ajax’s farewell to life occupies fifty lines, but is not all introspection. Much is addressed to Zeus as though he were present, rather than in the form of a prayer. He addresses the ‘light’ (φέγγος), his home in Salamis, Athens and the Athenians, and the plains of Troy. The end is brief, beyond pain and beyond despair, his mind made up, calm. Though Antigone shows a similar dignity and Deianeira a similar resolve, the solitary moment of decision from Ajax has no real parallel in Greek tragedy:

τοῦθ’ ὅμιν Αἴας τοῦπος ὕστατον θροεῖ,
τὰ δ’ ἄλλ’ ἐν Ἀΐδου τοῖς κάτω μυθήσονται. (864–865)

Simple speeches often prove the most resistant to translation. Sophocles ends with a verb, the longest and strongest word in the sentence. This is not a matter of versification or sentence structure, but of dramatic impact. None of the following, I feel, each selected from a different century, quite hits the right note:

Francklin (1759):

Tis the last word Ajax shall speak on earth:
The rest be uttered to the shades below.

Coleridge (1893):

This is the last word that Ajax speaks to you: henceforth he
will speak in Hades with the dead.

John Moore (1957):

Farewell! This last word Ajax gives to you;
The rest he keeps, to speak among the dead.

Shomit Dutta (2001):

... You who have nursed me, I bid you farewell!
These are the last words Ajax has to say.
The rest I’ll tell in Hades to the dead.

²¹ It was Philoctetes, as it happens, who eventually agreed to light the pyre.

5. *Translation and 'Dramatic Impact'*

Gilbert Murray was a major influence on the translation of Greek tragedy during the first half of the twentieth century, but not always a benign one. His idiosyncratic and archaic verse, often strained by the requirements of rhyme, was not to the taste of many commentators, as varied as Edith Hamilton, T.S. Eliot, and Peter Green. Many of his translations, however well they have sold over the years, now seem hopelessly dated. Nonetheless, in part through his contact with the Court Theatre in the early part of the twentieth century, he ensured that most subsequent translations have at least attempted to show sympathy to the possibility of performance. From the 1950s the imperative to produce a clear text that would be suitable for the classroom, but also for reading out loud, drove the Penguin Classics and Chicago's *Complete Greek Tragedies* series. Accessibility was as important as faithfulness to the original, and obscurity of meaning was the cardinal crime.

Old translations soon become museum pieces and 'old' tends to mean anything detectably written in the spirit of its own time. In recent years the Loeb editions have been given a makeover, and in the last twenty years there have been a number of spirited (and occasionally dispiriting) rivals to Penguin and Chicago from large and small presses which specialize in classics or drama, chief among them Aris and Phillips, Cambridge University Press, Dent (Everyman), Faber and Faber, Focus, Goldsmith, Hackett, Methuen Drama (now A&C Black), Nick Hern Books, Oberon, Oxford University Press, Pennsylvania University Press, Signet, Smith and Kraus, and The University of Massachusetts Press. Only the Dover translations, cheap because out of copyright, seem wholly wooden. The others differ considerably one from another, according to their special brief. Those with an adjacent Greek text often have copious and helpful notes; others are geared towards a playscript whose priority is to appeal to directors and to provide actors with material with which they feel they can work. Trial and error, and the dictates of bookshops, decide which have the most impressive shelf life and sales.

There is a third category which now comes into focus, the modern playwright/poet with little or no knowledge of the original Greek, but a deep understanding of the dramatic issues, and the pen to liberate them in the English of today.

In the last century, and especially from the nineteen-twenties to the nineteen-fifties, there was a vogue in Europe for classical plays extended, developed or reworked in a modern context. As Hall and Macintosh (2005)

have so comprehensively catalogued, this was always a fruitful field between 1660 and 1914 (their *termini*). The Greeks themselves returned time and again to the same myths. The surviving Sophocles seven contain no play whose source was not appropriated or matched by his contemporaries in Athens. Marianne McDonald has shown that the operatic repertoire from 1600 onwards owes a huge debt to Sophocles.²² There is also a fine range of evocations of 'Sophoclean' plays within different cultures, recent versions of the Oedipus to add to those of Cocteau, Anouilh, and Berkoff, now set in Nigeria, Japan, nineteenth-century South Carolina, or a twentieth-century Pentecostal church.²³ In the work of such writers as Seamus Heaney, Brendan Kennelly, Frank McGuinness, and Blake Morrison, translation becomes a very different animal.

Although all the seven plays have been seen in modernized versions in recent years—eight if Tony Harrison's reworking of Sophocles' fragmentary satyr play as *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* (1990) is included—*Antigone* has been the most popular choice. This is unsurprising, since the play presents a timeless confrontation between public obligation and private conscience. The option is open to the 'straight' translator to come down on the side either of Creon or of Antigone. But the best translators leave open the possibility of dividing sympathies between man and woman; uncle and sister of the unburied corpse; commander and civilian. Moral and political issues are there to be resolved by each reader, director or audience member.

There is room here for no more than a single example. After Antigone has been condemned to be walled up alive in a cave as punishment for flouting Creon's decree and burying her brother Polyneices, she embarks on a long speech justifying her actions. One section tends to divide translators and commentators, or, at the least, make them feel uncomfortable.²⁴ Antigone speaks of her fate as the reward for burying her brother and continues:

καίτοι σ' ἐγὼ τ'ίμησα τοῖς φρονοῦσιν εὖ.
οὐ γὰρ ποτ' οὔτ' ἂν εἰ τέκν' ὦν μήτηρ ἔφυν
οὔτ' εἰ πόσις μοι κατθανὼν ἐτήκετο,
βίᾳ πολιτῶν τόνδ' ἂν ἡρόμην πόνον.
τίνος νόμου δὴ ταῦτα πρὸς χάριν λέγω;

²² McDonald (2001). See also on Robert Auletta's translation in 'Peter Sellars' *Ajax*: The Obsolescence of Honor', McDonald (1992) 77–87.

²³ See especially on aspects of interculturalism, Steiner (1984); Scolnicov/Holland (1989); Hardwick (2000b); McDonald/Walton (2002); Dillon/Wilmer (2005); Hardwick/Stray (2008); Lianeri/Zajko (2008).

²⁴ Goethe was not alone in believing that the lines must be an interpolation.

πόσις μὲν ἂν μοι κατθανόντος ἄλλος ᾦν,
 καὶ παῖς ἅπ' ἄλλου φωτός, εἰ τοῦδ'
 ἥμπλακον,
 μητρός δ' ἐν Ἅιδου καὶ πατρός κεκευθότιν
 οὐκ ἔστ' ἀδελφός ὅστις ἂν βλάστοι ποτέ.
 τοιῶδε μέντοι σ' ἐκπροτιμήσας ἔγώ
 νόμῳ, Κρέοντι ταῦτ' ἔδοξ' ἀμαρτάνειν
 καὶ δεινὰ τολμᾶν, ὦ κασίγνητον Κάρα.

(904–915)

Lloyd-Jones' literal translation alongside the Greek in the Loeb edition (1994b) runs as follows:

Yet in the eyes of the wise I did well to honour you; for never, had children of whom I was the mother or had my husband perished and been mouldering there, would I have taken on myself this task, in defiance of the citizens. In virtue of what law [νόμος] do I say this? If my husband had died. I could have had another, and a child by another man, if I had lost the first, but with my mother and my father in Hades below, I could never have had another brother. Such was the law for whose sake I did you special honour, but to Creon I seemed to do wrong and to show shocking recklessness, O my own brother.

This is a speech in iambics, not lyrics, and here if ever, is justification for Hilaire Belloc's injunction in his Taylorian lecture at Oxford in 1931 for the translator to take note not only of the literary form but of 'the atmosphere of the word'.²⁵ These three poetic 'versions', from approximately the same passage of text, speak for themselves.

Brendan Kennelly:

My brother! It is for you I suffer this.
 This is my reward for loving you.
 And yet I only gave you what is rightly yours.
 If I had been the mother of children,
 If I had a husband in my home,
 I would not have done for them
 What I did for you.
 Why do I speak such words?
 A lost child can be replaced
 And other husbands can be found.
 But when my father and mother are dead
 No brother's life
 Can ever flower in me again.
 In me flourished the very best of men.

²⁵ Belloc (1931) 17.

Men!

Creon!

He sends me to my grave

Because I acted out my love.

(*Antigone*, p. 37)

Blake Morrison:

I can see Polyneices waiting too:

laying *your* body out was the death of me.

but I've no regrets—I did right to break the law.

I'd not have done it if I'd lost a child.

I'd not have done it if I'd lost a husband.

But you can find a second husband if you lose the first;

and if your baby dies, you have another.

But when your father and mother have passed on,

you've no chance of getting a new brother.

(*Antigone* p. 100)

Seamus Heaney:

... when I did

What people knew in their heart of hearts

Was right, I was doomed for it.

Not for a husband, not even for a son

Would I have broken the law.

Another husband I could always find

And have other sons by him if one were lost.

But with my father gone, and my mother gone,

Where can I find another brother, ever?

The law of this same logic I obeyed

when I disobeyed Creon. It's a rule of life,

But all Creon can see is a crazy girl

He must get rid of.²⁶

(*The Burial at Thebes* p. 40)

Any conclusion from all of this can only be that translating plays from ancient Greek into English, or any other language for that matter, is both an art and a craft best served by those with a theatrical as well as a linguistic sensibility. Sophocles was one of three great tragedians, living and making plays in the same city and in the same century, but wholly individual. Each has subsequently spoken in different ways to different generations. Sophocles' medium and means may have undergone changes to their nature. His messages, even in translation, are as cogent as they ever were.

²⁶ Heaney's 'version' was turned into an opera in 2008, with music by Dominique Le Gendre. Some of the speeches, of the Guard and Messenger for example, remained spoken, not sung.

SOPHOCLES MADE NEW: MODERN PERFORMANCES

Marianne McDonald

Sophocles specializes in heroism. His heroes will stand up for what they believe even if it costs their lives. This has made him a particular favourite of modern audiences. He was also popular in his own time. Tracking later productions is therefore an adventure in understanding modern cultures as well as that of ancient Greece.¹

Performances began in Athens in 534 BC with Thespis, and in the fifth century they were given at dramatic festivals. The more popular plays were often revived in the following century. During these revivals they were vulnerable to adaptation and additions by actors and producers. After the Athenian Academy was closed in 529 AD, classical texts and performance disappeared from sight for several centuries and did not re-emerge until the revival of learning in the early Byzantine period.

Greek tragedy became known in the West mainly through Latin translations, and often via Seneca (ca. 4 BC–65 AD). It is debatable whether Seneca's dramas were ever actually performed in his lifetime. They always feature violence onstage, something that replicated the Rome of his time (he suffered under Nero's excesses and was finally forced by him to commit suicide). The ancient Greeks did not relish this violence on their stage.

This chapter will not list all modern productions; rather, a few will be selected as representative. A modern playwright should remember that the recent play is often compared with the original ancient play, and in many cases such comparisons show the modern version falling short. The ancient playwrights not only had profound themes, which remain relevant, but they were also poets. In modern times I find the poets often miss the drama, and dramatic playwrights often miss the poetry. Modern versions on political themes often demonize one side and lose the rich ambiguity of the Greek originals. Productions ought to be faithful to the text, but accessible to

¹ In the course of writing this essay, I have consulted the following: Kirkwood (1958); Kitto (1958); Knox (1964); Long (1968); Webster (1969²); Reinhardt (1979); Walton (1980), (1987a), (1996²), (2006a); Winnington-Ingram (1980); Stanford (1983); Blundell (1989a); McDonald (1992), (2001), (2003); Wiles (2000); Hall/Macintosh (2005).

audiences. If they are versions, they should succeed on their own merits. Masks rarely work in the modern West, because actors are not trained to use them as they do in Asia, or as they were in antiquity. They also do not seem to suit the intimate theatre of the West. Too much technology can ruin a production, and is best left to the cinema.

This will be my tentative chronological order, except that, for organizational purposes, I follow productions of *Oedipus Tyrannus* with those of *Oedipus at Colonus*:

Antigone 443 or 441 BC

Ajax ca. 442 BC

Trachiniae ca. 432 BC

Oedipus Tyrannus ca. 427 BC

Oedipus at Colonus 401 BC (posthumous)

Electra ca. 413 BC

Philoctetes 409 BC

Films based on these plays will not be mentioned here, given space limitations.

Sophocles has probably shown us in *Antigone* the first civil rights resistor in dramatic history: '... I didn't think that any edict issued by you, Creon, had the power to override the unwritten and unfailing law of the gods'.² *Antigone* was very popular in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. It has often been performed during political unrest. In 1804 Friedrich Hölderlin's translation *Antigonae* coupled fidelity to the original with poetic flair.

In 1898 *Antigone* was first performed in Russia at the Moscow Art Theatre in a translation by Dimitri Merezhkovsky. There was an attempt to preserve the ancient ritual and ceremony. At the same time there was an attempt at realism, and psychological fidelity to the characters as had been developed in the theatre of Chekhov. There is an obvious clash in these two approaches, but this marked an experimental advance in Russian theatre. No curtain separated the stage from the audience. There was an altar on the set with a flame burning on it throughout the performance. The young V. Meyerhold appeared as Tiresias, and in later life he based his performances on classical Greek theatre.

A French version of *Antigone* was produced by Jean Cocteau in 1922 with sets by Picasso, music by Arthur Honegger and costumes by Chanel. In general, Cocteau abbreviated Sophocles' splendid text, and effectively

² All translations are my own, unless indicated.

eliminated the poetry. He simplified the text to make it more dramatically viable, and to allow for various dumb shows (consisting of statue-like figures crossing the stage during performance). For the 1927 revival he has gigantic heads, and masked figures. His choices eliminate Sophocles' suggestive ambiguity. His *Antigone* is naïve and reductive of the brilliant original.

Jean Anouilh staged his *Antigone* (1944) during the Nazi occupation of Paris; his even-handed presentation of both Creon's and Antigone's positions got it past the censors. Creon stands for life, with all its compromises; he speaks with the voice of rationality and conventionality. Antigone is a romantic young girl who says 'No' to orders and convention. She no longer stands for the honour and right of the family and the gods of the underworld as she did in Sophocles. She is a stubborn little girl who insists on dying, although she is given many chances to escape. Creon even admits that the bodies of her brothers were indistinguishable, and his insistence on one not being buried is simply a political move to keep him in power. Antigone is shown attached to her pet, her nurse, and her fiancé (in that order), to whom she smuggles a final message. Anouilh does not give Antigone the heroic value that she had for Sophocles, but instead offers a play of intellectual tricks.

Bertolt Brecht's *Antigone* (1948) showed Creon overtly as Hitler, along with his aggressive son Megareus who continues to fight and finally brings defeat on Thebes, an allusion to modern Germany. He succeeds in his *Verfremdungseffekt*, alienating us from all the characters, including Antigone. Brecht objected to what he saw as Antigone's pacifism. He thought she did a disservice to the memory of the German partisans who fought against the Nazis. Judith Malina's 1966 version of Brecht's *Antigone* was performed in sixteen countries over twenty years including Ireland, Franco's Spain, Poland, and Prague, all at politically crucial times.

In 1949, Carl Orff had his opera *Antigonae* performed, based on Hölderlin's translation. He returned to the Sophoclean original for its postwar messages. He had his earlier work performed under the Nazis, although like Anouilh's it contained veiled criticism.

Athol Fugard's *The Island* (1973) features black prisoners of South Africa's apartheid playing out *Antigone* in protest. *The Island* was also staged in Ireland in 1986 and revived in London at the Royal National Theatre in 2000. Fugard's play opens with a scene that shows two inmates doing the horrible, futile work that was assigned to them on Robben Island (where Nelson Mandela and other protesters were confined). The characters are chained and forced to run in tandem; if they do not run fast enough they are beaten. In the cell they disinfect their wounds with their own urine.

Through drama the prisoners try to remain sane. They are allowed 'concerts'. In the concert that is the subject of this play, they intend to perform a freely adapted and abbreviated version of Sophocles' *Antigone*. One of the inmates, John (Creon), learns that he is going to be free in three months. The other, Winston (Antigone), is in for life. The agony of the latter gives fuel to the final performance of *Antigone*.

The inmates perform a scene from the drama that is highly rewritten. It is clear that Creon represents the oppressive power of *apartheid*, and Antigone/Winston represents human rights. Antigone says to Creon, 'You are only a man, Creon. Even as there are laws made by men, so too there are others that come from God. He watches my soul for a transgression even as your spies hide in the bush at night to see who is transgressing your laws. Guilty against God I will not be for any man on this earth ... But if I had let my mother's son, a Son of the Land, lie there as food for the carrion fly ... my soul would never have known peace'.³ This performance indicted the guards watching the performance and the system that condoned their abuses.

At the end of the prison concert, this character tears off his wig and says, 'Gods of our Fathers! My Land! My Home! Time waits no longer. I go now to my living death, because I honoured those things to which honour belongs', a literal, albeit abbreviated, translation of Antigone's final words in Sophocles' play.⁴ We are left with an image of human triumph. Oppression is overcome by the greatness of the human spirit.

Antigone was in fact first performed in prison, but in Fugard's transformation it became not only daring, but provided needed *catharsis* for the audience. It was first performed at the Space Theatre in Cape Town. From the window at the back of the theatre could be seen Robben Island itself. This is not only a protest play, but also a human drama, so it escapes the accusation of melodrama levelled at so many modern versions in which good so obviously opposes evil.

Andrzej Wajda produced a version in 1984 for the Delphi international festival in Greece, showing *Antigone* aligned with the Solidarity Movement against communism, and was set in a Gdansk shipyard. His Chorus wore miner's helmets that signalled their rebellion, and they cheered Antigone in opposing Creon.

The Irish use *Antigone* to indict British occupation.⁵ In 1984, Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* gave us an Antigone from Northern Ireland, and she was a

³ Fugard (1993) 226.

⁴ Fugard (1993) 227.

⁵ See my book co-edited with J. Michael Walton (2007).

freedom fighter, whereas Creon's words sounded like Ian Paisley's. Aidan Carl Mathews' *Antigone* (1984) had his heroine unjustly murdered, whereas official propaganda claimed that she had been seen in another country. Also in 1984 Brendan Kennelly saw Irish relevance in his *Antigone*. He focused on the power of words for both good and evil. Both *Antigone* and Creon speak to each other in a common language, but they do not understand each other—an ongoing tragedy in the peace negotiations between England and Ireland.

The memory of the dead is dangerous. Kennelly's *Antigone* says that she has more love for the mistreated noble dead than for the ambitious living. *Antigone*'s acts lead to the downfall of a tyrant, and she is inspired by the dead of her past, as so many of the Republican heroes who were inspired by the Fenian dead and the modern hunger strikers such as Bobby Sands. Creon here is Cromwell, and symbolic of England and its occupation. *Antigone*'s moral superiority wins. We find the Catholic God in this *Antigone* as we do in many Irish reworkings of the classics.

Another political performance was *Antigone: A Cry for Peace* (1994), produced by Nikos Koundouros at the border of former Yugoslavia with a military backdrop featuring tanks.

In 1999 Athol Fugard directed my translation of *Antigone* in Cork and Listowel, Ireland. *Antigone* was played by an actress (Patricia Logue) from Derry (Londonderry), and her accent clearly located the political thrust of the play. The Chorus was played by Celina Hinchcliffe, of Irish ancestry, but raised in England. Trina Dillon who played Ismene was of the same background. Creon was played by Damien Scranton whose father was black and his mother white. He taught black students in New York and felt he could protect them most by urging them to obey the law, so he played his role in real life. Steffen Collings, of English ancestry, played Haemon. The messenger and guard was Irish-American, Kelly Doyle. Tiresias was Ivan Talijancic, a Serbo-Croatian student. Their countries of origin nuanced their roles.

At the end Ismene broke the final silence and called quietly, 'Antigone?' three times. The lights went up. One would hope to convey by this question not only loss, but also the need for *Antigone* and her sense of justice in the modern world.

There were several revivals of this translation. One in 2000 was brought to the international festival of Greek drama in Delphi by an Irish professional theatrical group, DonAd, and it featured Irish folksongs. This also played in Vienna. When this same translation came to San Diego in May 2005, it expressed the growing weariness with America's invasion of Iraq.

A new production of this translation opened first at Sixth at Penn Theatre in San Diego, with a black director, Delicia Turner Sonnenberg. To escape economic hardship, many blacks and Hispanics enlisted to fight in Iraq, a war that they may have believed in initially since they were duped by the propaganda. The multicultural casting of this production reflected this fact. One Chorus that praised God (Dionysus) was sung like a black spiritual.

The modern costume choices were political statements. Antigone was dressed in a sweatshirt, fatigues, and hiking boots. She came across as an outraged Cindy Sheehan, the woman who became an anti-war protestor when her son was killed in Iraq, now a representative of the democratic protest that wants President Bush to account for misleading the country into war. Ismene, by contrast, was dressed like a fat-cat Republican with hair up, heels, and a fashionable suit. Eurydice, Creon's wife, and Creon himself came onstage in formal wear. The women wore expensive-looking jewellery suggesting wealth and the politics that usually go along with it. A large sign at the back of the set said 'Mission Accomplished' in Greek letters, reminiscent of October 2003 when Bush addressed the nation from the U.S. aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln against the backdrop of a similar sign to impress television audiences. For both Bush and Creon, the gloating was premature. It was particularly effective to see the sign as the backdrop for Creon mourning over the corpses of his wife and son at the end of the play. 'Mission Accomplished' takes on a new meaning as the final Chorus chants: 'Never show disrespect to the gods'. The gods' mission to send punishment was accomplished. The actor playing Creon (Dale Morris) had a southern accent, an obvious take on Bush. He appeared charming at the beginning, and danced with his wife to celebrate the opening victory.

In opera, Antigone was not popular in the seventeenth century, nor the nineteenth, but enormously so in the eighteenth and twentieth.⁶ Powerful women as heroines, like Medea and Antigone, were tolerated as operatic themes only in the centuries when discussions of women's rights were particularly lively.

The next play, *Ajax*, also can be used to indict political abuses. Ajax gave his life for what he believed and said: 'A brave man must either live with honour, or die with it'. Peter Sellars set *Ajax* (1986, adapted by Robert Auletta) in front of the Pentagon, and showed the corruption of generals

⁶ See McDonald (2001).

who both censor information and are power-crazed. Ajax was played by a deaf-mute, Howie Seago, who sloshed around knee deep in blood in a large transparent booth. The Chorus of soldiers delivered his lines.

Sophocles' *Trachiniae* is not a popular play for modern performances. It lacks obvious political relevance since its main theme is the destructiveness of jealousy and lust.

Seneca wrote two plays based on Sophocles: *Hercules Oetaeus*, based in part on *Trachiniae*, and *Oedipus*. The first shows us a Stoic hero. At the end, Hercules' voice is heard: he has been translated to the heavens, proof of his divine origin. This apotheosis purges him of sin and guilt. He is not only a constellation, but exists among the gods. This saviour, benefactor of mankind and son of a god, is risen from the dead. His mother prays to him to save the world in its time of need.

This is more a Stoic *exemplum* and philosophical tract than a play that excites an audience. The list of Hercules' labours grows tedious. The play shows a Stoic hero overcoming passion and pain. Deianeira is the opposite and gives in to her passion, committing suicide as a gesture of despair. They show the two alternatives of moral conduct. One wonders if Hercules' pain at the end really compensates for the pain he caused Deianeira by his philandering and many absences. Modern audiences feel sympathy for Deianeira.

Oedipus Tyrannus, possibly the most popular of all of Sophocles' plays, features a hero who will not give up his search for the truth, even if what he discovers precipitates his own destruction. He chooses to live even when it seems there is nothing more for him to lose. This play celebrates human endurance and courage.

Horror and gloom oppress Seneca's *Oedipus*. The description of the plague is as gory as any description offered in literature. This is coupled with a vision of Hades and bloody sacrifices. Seneca gives Teiresias a daughter, Manto, who is able to describe the sacrificial victims in graphic detail, and Jocasta kills herself onstage in view of the audience.

At the end, Oedipus is sent into exile, and willingly invites the Fates, disease, plague, and sorrow itself to be his guides as he leaves the city. He is the ideal scapegoat. The wordplay and irony is very different from the Sophoclean version, and the role of Jocasta is drastically reduced: the children never appear. There are no moments of cautious optimism. Magic, ghosts, cruelty, torture, and fear abound. This is a study in unmitigated darkness, not only of the sky, but the human soul.

There was a famous performance of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* in 1585 to open Palladio's Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza. The music for the odes was

by Andrea Gabrieli. Masks were not used in this production. An actress as young or younger than Oedipus played Jocasta, and this led to criticism. More criticism came from the fact that natural speech was used in the translation, and that the lavish set belied the poverty of a plague-ridden city. A chorus leader delivered the choral lines, and musical interludes punctuated the five acts. One can see how this aristocratic production was progressing towards opera. Aspects of the performance criticized then would be praised today: intelligible choruses delivered by the chorus leader and accessible language.

Versions of *Oedipus Tyrannus* were staged by Pierre Corneille in 1659, and Voltaire in 1718. Racine has a majestic *Thébaïde* (1664), with all the augmented stage effects which characterized that century given so much royal patronage.

After Dryden and Lee's version in 1678, and its occasional revivals (such as in the highly altered version by Shelley in 1818 of *Swellfoot the Tyrant*), *Oedipus* was banned from the English professional stage until modern times because the theme of incest bothered the Lord Chamberlain.

Friedrich Schiller wrote *Die Braut von Messina, oder Die feindlichen Brüder* ('*The Bride from Messina, or the Hostile Brothers*') in 1802–1803 as a Greek tragedy in five acts with choruses. It drew on the Oedipus myth with the oracle, exposed child, and brothers who are rivals, in this case not for the throne, but for their own unrecognized sister, instilling the popular note of romance that characterized dramatic productions in the nineteenth century. Both brothers are killed, one at the other's hand, and the other by suicide as expiation.

Only in 1912 was Max Reinhardt given permission to stage *Oedipus* in London to a text by Gilbert Murray, following his successful staging of *Oedipus* using Hugo von Hofmannsthal's version (in 1910, in Munich). Reinhardt's performance was at Covent Garden and it opened with a crowd that rushed through the audience to reach the stage at the beginning, and featured a Chorus of dark-skinned slaves.

Sophocles' King Oedipus: A Version for the Modern Stage, by W.B. Yeats, was performed at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in 1926 and his *Oedipus at Colonus* in 1927. He added accessible language to make the play more immediately dramatic for a modern audience. He also added recognizable Irish elements.

Yeats removed what he saw as difficulties in Sophocles, including much of the irony, many metaphoric or mythological allusions, and even long reflections, such as Oedipus' final despairing speech. For many years Yeats' 'translations' served to introduce schoolchildren to Sophocles. Misleading

as this might have been, it was compensated for by the quality of his language, and his mixture of prose for the iambic sections and poetry for the choruses, which set a standard for many other translations.

In *Oedipus at Colonus*, the characters were transformed into the lasses and lads of the Irish countryside, or in haunted woods: 'The wine-dark of the wood's intricacies,/The nightingale that deafens daylight there,/If daylight ever visit'

Yeats admitted he was describing Ireland rather than Colonus, 'When Oedipus at Colonus went into the wood of the Furies he felt the same creeping in his flesh that an Irish countryman feels in certain haunted woods in Galway and in Sligo'.

Antigone's lamentation at the end was severely cut to concentrate on the mystery and spirituality of Oedipus' death and transfiguration. There seems to be a personal statement—as clear as Sophocles' own—in the way in which Yeats makes his Oedipus a proud hero who does not cling to life but, in the celebrated words of the Chorus, utters 'a gay goodnight and quickly turns away'.

Jean Cocteau provided spoken interludes for Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* (1927), an operatic version in Latin. Stravinsky wanted modern audiences to concentrate on the music, so he used a Latin text as simply a percussive element that most people did not understand. The role of the diva also reinforces Jocasta, and she grows in presence and strength even as Oedipus is weakened. She is the heroic tragic individual in this opera, and must die. Her music as a coloratura mezzo-soprano enhances her as a queen. Her vocal line lends her a majesty and dignity that makes us understand that she is not only Oedipus' queen, but also his mother. The regal music that announces her also shows us who is actually in power. Oedipus' music is whining by comparison.

There are definite allusions to a Catholic Mass. Oedipus and Jocasta's music, which derives from nineteenth-century Italian opera, cedes finally to more ritualistic music. By conflating the Mass with ancient tragedy, perhaps Stravinsky reveals his own pessimism, yet at the same time his hope for some type of redemption. The emphasis is on collective renewal and rebirth rather than the death of the individual. The Chorus' gentle farewell mediates the horror and shock revealed by the Chorus in Sophocles' play whose final words in that context imply that death will be the only possible release from this world's pain:

You who are born to die,
Look to your last day.
Call no one happy,

Until that person has ended life
Free from sorrow.

Julie Taymor directed an excellent performance of *Oedipus Rex* in Tokyo in 1992 with the Tokyo Opera Singers. This production, now on DVD, combines Japanese theatrical traditions with modern Western ones. The monumental quality demanded by Stravinsky is aptly met by traditions from Noh, Kabuki, and Bunraku (the puppet theatre).

This is a brilliant production starring Min Tanaka as the dancer Oedipus, Philip Langridge as the tenor singing the role, and Jessye Norman as Jocasta. Norman fills the role with her rich full tones.

The major characters have pre-Cycladic masks above their made-up faces. The hands are made of the same material and are larger than life. Teiresias has eyes painted in his hands. These characters appear monumental. The Chorus first appear covered with grey dust that suggests their skin is flaking off, as if they were victims of Hiroshima, but we are to understand that this is the plague which Oedipus will expiate. It is obvious that Butoh shaped the staging here, since white make-up gives the characters the appearance of corpses, or ghosts. Butoh was the dance form developed after the Hiroshima disaster, and the actors featured shaven heads and bodies covered in white make-up to give them the appearance of corpses or ghosts, sometimes gods, who were to inspire the performances. Butoh aims to recreate the spiritually informed performances of Noh. It marries well with Stravinsky's recreation of a Greek classic.

The final scene in which the Chorus bids Oedipus farewell is enacted in the rain, and we see Tanaka walk through a metal maze as he 'leaves Thebes'. The strange percussion of the rain is a fitting conclusion, a bleak purification, and the metal replicates the prison of fate, which is now provided by Oedipus' memories.

Cocteau's *La machine infernale* (1934) shows man caught by fate and Freud, truth and illusion, along with the absurd struggle of man who is only hastening to his death. Cocteau's introduction speaks of a wound-up machine waiting for its spring to unwind in a human lifetime. It is an ideal machine designed by the infernal gods to destroy man. Cocteau plays all the intellectual tricks for which the French are famous, but the essential Sophoclean drama with its tight plot and irony eludes him. He is more discursive in his four acts: they are both cinematic and epic, filled with soundbites. All the events leading up to Sophocles' *Oedipus* are recounted in the first three acts, and only in the last do we reach the beginning of Sophocles' original. In Cocteau's final act, Sophocles' entire play is per-

formed in telegraphic fashion. The first act gives us Laius haunting the ramparts like the ghost of Hamlet's father, trying in vain to warn Jocasta that their son has killed him and is on his way to marry her. The mood is light-hearted for the most part, nevertheless Jocasta's getting entangled in her long scarf ominously anticipates the means she will use to hang herself.

Jocasta is attracted to young soldiers. There is the implication that she has had an affair with Teiresias (called Zizi) who tries to keep her under his religious thumb. There are Marxist asides. For instance, the soldier says of the ghost being ignored by Jocasta, 'now he's seen how hard it is to be heard by those in power'.

When Oedipus blinds himself, Teiresias tells Creon that Oedipus is now beyond his authority. Now he belongs to the people, the poets, and the pure of heart. This version is witty and filled with *bons mots*. It does not tackle all the major themes of Sophocles' version, that is, about the search for truth and personal responsibility. Instead it shows that poetry, wit, and love are the man's chief medicines for the disease of fate. It has much more comedy than the original.

The Nigerian playwright Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1968) is based on *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and incorporates ritual, folk sayings, and descriptions of tribal warfare. Rotimi claims that drama is a useful artistic medium for expression in Africa because it is not alien, like the novel. After studying in Boston, Rotimi returned to Nigeria to establish a national theatre, and his drama features Nigerian names and local atmosphere. This is an overtly political play, not dealing so much with racism, or the experience of being occupied, as with the bloodshed entailed by one tribe fighting another. The killing here happens not because one man is trying to pass another on the road, but because a man from one tribe (Adetusa/Laius) is trying to take over the land occupied by a man from another tribe (Ode-wale/Oedipus).

A prologue sets out the background in mime. African choral singing with drums figures prominently. Ogun and the other gods of the Yoruba pantheon are invoked. We are told of tribes attacking tribes, and how Odewale overcame the sphinx, in this case by freeing the country Kutuje from its invaders. We meet a very human Odewale, who, when the country is stricken with plague, produces his own children to show that they also are infected. He tells his people to use medicinal herbal cures instead of simply praying to the gods. As he says later, 'The gods are not to blame'. Although Odewale is clearly a victim of fate, he also speaks of man helping himself, and is aware of human responsibility.

African chants form the choruses and in the printed text are given both in native Yoruban and English; many are akin to incantations. Native magic is used and folk sayings often accompany formal speeches, with homely proverbs such as 'Until the rotten tooth is pulled out, the mouth must chew with caution', advocating that Odewale go slowly in rooting out the murderer of Adetusa, and 'The monkey and gorilla may claim oneness but the monkey is Monkey and the gorilla, Gorilla', to illustrate how one tribe will not accept another.

Physical cruelty is emphasized here even more than in Sophocles' tragedy. The curse that Odewale calls down on the 'murderer of Adetusa' is brutal. How different is the Sophoclean original where exile is to be the sole punishment of the man who confesses to the murder of Laius.

Women and children are treated as inferiors. When the king enters 'children either kneel or prostrate themselves, according to their sex'. Contrary to Sophocles' deference to her classical equivalent Jocasta, Ojuola is treated like a servant.

After the revelation of his identity, Odewale responds by saying, 'Do not blame the gods ... they knew my weakness: the weakness of a man easily moved to the defense of his tribe against others. I once slew a man on my farm in Ede. I could have spared him. But he spat on my tribe. He spat on the tribe I thought was my own tribe ... I lost my reason'.

Here is a parable for the intertribal fighting of Africa with Xhosa against Zulu in South Africa, Tutsi against Hutu in Rwanda and, naturally, the war Rotimi knew best, the Biafran war, to say nothing of Darfur in the Sudan. Of course, this fighting is comparable to the wars of Ireland, Yugoslavia, and the Middle East. The play thus achieves a universal status, and yet it ends with Odewale leaving with all his children, saying,

When
The wood-insect
Gathers sticks,
On its own head it
Carries
Them.

This is an effective reworking of the original to touch on both universal and local issues. Some of the Sophoclean irony and the taut detective-story plot from the original are lost, but this African play captures the fundamental lesson that comes from *anagnorisis*, or recognition of who one is and why one acts as one does.

In 1978 Jean Anouilh wrote *Oedipus, or The King with a Limp, after Sophocles*, but it has not been yet performed in English since it lacks a

translation.⁷ His *Antigone*, *Eurydice*, and *Medea* all show rebellious females who, like Oedipus, refuse to compromise. Anouilh presents his characters with psychological acuity. There are elements of modern religion and philosophy. As in most of the French versions, the characters speak explicitly about their sexual natures and experiences.

At the end, the Chorus tells us that life has returned to normal. The plague will be simply a memory which the old will tell their children. There are just as many deaths each day: 'Unhappiness, like in the story of Oedipus that you have just heard, is not always so exceptional'.

This is a very moving play and touches the audience personally at the same time that it deals in archetypes and universals. Anouilh does more than Cocteau ever did with his clever tricks. He has written a play about people with whom one identifies and about whom one is concerned. He also understands love. Berkoff has made an equally sympathetic and sexually attractive Jocasta. Now Neil LaBute has added his version, *Wrecks*, to this list (performed at the Bush in London, March, 2009).

Steven Berkoff's *Greek*, which opened in London in 1980, is a modern version set in the East End of London. Oedipus ('Eddie') marries his mother, and he is perfectly happy to remain married to her. Berkoff has extended poetic passages, particularly when Oedipus reveals his love for his mother as a sexually exciting partner. Berkoff claimed he was writing a 'love poem to the spirit of Oedipus over the centuries'.

The set was spare: a black wall in the back, and dirty white walls on each side. A table and chairs were in the centre. The actors were in whiteface, a type of make-up mask permitting the audience to see the face. Actions were stylized, and at times the characters seemed to be puppets, somehow monumental. The sphinx was a woman, also in whiteface, with enormous eyes that she kept crossed. A Chorus acted out the horrors they witnessed, and duplicated deformities by pulling at their faces. There was a lot of humour. Mum: 'more tea love?' This is her solution to any crisis. Dad: 'What do you make of it son? You don't fancy your old mum do you son? You don't want to kill me do you boy?'

This is Oedipus with a happy ending: accept the violence; accept what fate has in store for you, and enjoy it! There is a biting edge to the satire, but genuine love poetry at the same time. The message seems to be that one can never have enough love, no matter where it comes from. An opera was

⁷ J. Michael Walton and I have translated this, but it has not yet been approved by the Anouilh estate.

based on *Greek*, composed by Mark-Anthony Turnage and first performed in 1988 in London.

The first Chinese performance of Greek tragedy was an *Oedipus Rex*, in 1986, at the Beijing Central Academy of Drama. It was translated by the pioneer scholar Luo Nian Sheng. (Since then the entire canon has been translated into Chinese.) It was performed at the Second Ancient Greek Drama Festival in Delphi, and directed by Luo Jin Lin. The Chorus wore shoes that made them all the same height, indicating both social and dramatic equality. Oedipus' personal tragedy is transformed into a social drama. Oedipus puts out his eyes behind the Chorus so that he is not visible to the audience. He emerges with a black band covering his eyes in the style of traditional Chinese opera.

Rita Dove's *The Darker Face of the Earth*, showing Oedipus as a slave in the American South, was performed in Oregon in 1996 and in 1999 at the Royal National Theatre in London. Secretly having had sexual intercourse with one of her slaves, the white mistress of the house, Amalia, gives birth to a black child, and her husband and doctor take it from her. The husband wants to kill it, but the doctor relents, and so the story of Oedipus begins again.

The child, Augustus, educated by a kind ship's captain but finally sold upon the captain's death as a slave, makes his way back to the house where he was born. He is seduced by Amalia. Augustus kills a black man (Hector) in a swamp, not knowing that Hector was his father, and finally, in a revolutionary coup, kills the master of the house who is married to Amalia. Augustus tells her what her husband began to tell him about his birth, and she finishes the story. Augustus realizes the truth that Amalia is his mother.

Amalia stabs herself, and the revolutionaries think that Augustus has carried out his task of killing both the master and mistress of the house. He does not put out his eyes, but a better future seems to lie before him, complete with a love interest in another slave. Here instead of a king Oedipus, ruling with Jocasta and concerned for his people, we find a slave who is a leader of others in their fight for freedom. Oedipus is conflated with American history, and Dove's poetry and passion deliver an impressive play.

Oedipus at Colonus has seen fewer versions and performances, although it is sometimes done as part of a double bill with *Oedipus Tyrannus*. In 1845 Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Potsdam performed an *Oedipus at Colonus* with music by Mendelssohn, besides a performance of *Antigone*, also with music by Mendelssohn (which reached London in 1845 and went on to Dublin).

T.S. Eliot's *The Elder Statesman* (1958) is based on *Oedipus at Colonus*. It is rarely performed, but was revived in 2008 in a performed reading at the

King's Head theatre, 2008. It does not attain the majesty of the Sophoclean original with the long-suffering Oedipus going to his death in the grove of the Eumenides. This shows the story of a man who wears the mask of an elder statesman.

Lee Breuer and Bob Telson based their work on an amalgamation of Sophocles' Theban plays and gospel music from the 1980s by Ben Halley Jr. and Fourteen Karat Soul, and called it *The Gospel at Colonus* (1982). This includes the highlights from Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* as well as *Oedipus at Colonus* in his *Gospel at Colonus*. In the guise of a black revival service, Breuer draws on the rich Afro-American gospel tradition. Oedipus is blended with Christ, a difficult match.

The setting is a church with a cycloramic painting of the Last Judgment as background. A preacher reads from 'The Book of Oedipus'. Some characters only sing, such as Ismene in accordance with her lyrical nature; others only speak, like Theseus and Polyneices, following their less lyrical and more legalistic approaches to life. Oedipus and Antigone are each played by two people, one that sings and one that acts. Oedipus the singer is played by a blind man, the leader of a group called the Five Blind Boys of Alabama, who function as his private Chorus.

At the end, when Oedipus dies, he sinks down, along with his quintet, all resting their heads on the piano, which is their bier. They then disappear into an open grave. Then to the amazement of all, the bier reappears, ascending to a hallelujah Chorus, and Oedipus and the quintet emerge clapping. Oedipus is truly immortal. We have seen him die and now he is resurrected. This is very different from Sophocles: in his play we do not see Oedipus return; there the mourning of Antigone will last.

No two performances of *The Gospel at Colonus* are alike and the congregational choir interacts constantly with the other actors and singers. This is a communal creation and much is unpredictable, spontaneous emotions adding to every performance. This also shows how Greek tragedy benefits from music in performance.

Wole Soyinka, the 1986 Nobel Prize-winning poet/playwright from Nigeria, wrote a version of *Oedipus at Colonus* called *Oyedipu at Kolhuni*, which was produced at the Delphi International Festival of Ancient Greek Drama in 2002. It told of a group of boat people from Afghanistan being turned away when they landed in Australia. There was a Nigerian Chorus adding commentary. Soyinka's dramas always have a political edge.

There was a Japanese version of *Oedipus* produced by Tadashi Suzuki in Delphi in 2000. Suzuki's *Oedipus* was stylized madness that undercut the heroic quest of Oedipus to find the truth about himself, something that

ultimately destroyed him as much as it burnt away the dross, granting him insight not only into himself but into the universe. Nothing of the original majesty has survived in Suzuki's version. Technological glitter and elaborate formal Japanese robes have produced a hollow shell, a statement of the modern commitment to materialism over the spirit.

This production showed a Japanese ruler destroyed by revelations by the Fates who appear like ghosts out of Noh, rather like the witches in Suzuki's production of *Macbeth* (*The Chronicle of Macbeth*, Melbourne, 1992). Oedipus' memories unfold as if they were mad hallucinations, an effect encouraged by Suzuki's elaborate lighting. Creon speaks behind a mirror-like door, transparent, but lit from behind to create an illusion of being Oedipus' double. Suzuki's mirror doubling would support Creon's claim in the original not to be after the throne itself, because he had all the power anyway without its worries.

As Oedipus gradually realizes who he is and his limitations as a mortal, Suzuki lights the crags of Parnassus, the Phaedriades, which loom over Oedipus, putting him in perspective. Oedipus was dressed in the gold-encrusted robes worn by rulers in feudal Japan, but this costume, along with his power, are shown to be nothing by the end of this play. His *karma* overtakes him. As Buddhists claim, *karma* leads to *dukkha*, suffering, until one reaches enlightenment. In this production, Oedipus gains knowledge, but no enlightenment. The final gesture is to put out his eyes. No Jocasta, no children, and no Creon—in the end, just man and his fate.

Exits and Entrances (2004), a relatively new play by Athol Fugard, raises a question of identity that parallels Oedipus's own search for identity.⁸ This play includes Fugard as a young writer (called 'Playwright' in the play) apprenticed to the great Afrikaans actor André Huguenet (1906–1961). It shows how Huguenet, introducing classical drama to South Africa, rose to the top of his profession. It also shows his fall, and a parallel is drawn with Oedipus, which is one of the roles Huguenet played to great critical acclaim. But it bankrupted him and he ended up as a manager, ticket collector, and usher at a shabby movie theatre, where he lived in dread that someone who had seen him onstage would recognize him and see how far he had fallen. In Fugard's play, one of the last lessons Huguenet learns is humility.

⁸ Page numbers for passages cited from Fugard's play come from *Exits and Entrances* (Claremont, SA: David Philip, New Africa Books, 2005). I translated the Oedipus passages used in the play and wrote the Afterword ('About the Play'), conducting an interview with Fugard which is printed after the Afterword, pp. 48–72.

Finally Huguenet experiences despair. Having sunk professionally, unable to publicly embrace his homosexuality, Huguenet commits suicide.

Fugard traces Huguenet's own rise and fall through theatre, first as the arrogant Oedipus of Sophocles, still proud when he faces reversal; then as the humbled cardinal in Bridget Boland's *The Prisoner* (1954); and finally debating his suicide as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (ca. 1600), each providing commentary on phases of his own life. Not only does this play reflect the old South Africa's intolerance of homosexuals, but also offers a parallel between Huguenet and Oedipus himself, as Fugard traces his rise and fall.

For example, the Playwright's opening reminiscence contained a graphic description of Huguenet's agonized cry when as Oedipus he realized that he had murdered his father, married his mother, and was both father and brother to his own children:

André, as Oedipus, standing at the top of the steps in front of the doors of his Theban palace, became very still, and we ordinary mortals held our breaths and waited. In those terribly silent seconds it seemed as if the whole world was waiting, and at the point when you thought you could no longer endure it and would have to scream, at that precise moment, not a second too soon or too late, André opened his mouth and out of it came the most awful cry that any member of that audience had ever heard. It sounded as if he had somehow reached down deep into himself and was dragging his genitals up through his body and throat and hanging them out of his mouth for all of us to spit on and curse. And that wasn't just one memorable performance! Oh no. André knew it was the moment of the play, so he hit that mark with uncanny accuracy virtually every night. (2–3)⁹

Huguenet's roles were delivered in blood, and he told the Playwright that as an actor he "lusts after those final moments of [Oedipus'] unspeakable agony and terrible torment. I've even come to love the taste of that stage-blood dripping from my face ..." (17). Acting was his own lifeblood, and his roles were his life.

Theatre was an existential affirmation for Huguenet, just as writing was for the Playwright. However, at the end he had no illusions and said to the young author:

⁹ Athol Fugard's *Exits and Entrances* (Claremont, South Africa: New Africa Books, David Philip publishers, 2005): page numbers for this play will refer to this edition. Fugard quoted from my translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, produced in fall 2003 at the Sixth at Penn Theatre, San Diego, and directed by George Ye. Page numbers will refer to this text for quotes from this play. See also my 'Black Antigone and Gay Oedipus: Postcolonial Dramatic Legacies in the New South Africa', the inaugural lecture for the Centre for the Receptions of Greece and Rome at Royal Holloway, University of London in May, 2008, and published not only on the web (www.crggr.org), but by *Arion*, Spring, 2009.

I could go through the entire list of roles I have played and at the end what did they all add up to?—an ageing old gay ham as full of arrogance and conceit as the pretentious young fool I was at your age. (41)

Huguenet, unlike Oedipus, was not blinded by his own *hubris*. However, that did not prevent him from acting like a tyrant, albeit benevolently. Huguenet was imperious, witty if not catty, and idealistic, although finally his depression overcame him. André even, or perhaps especially, in defeat was still majestic, and this was well conveyed in the 2005 South African production directed by Janice Honeyman with Sean Taylor playing André.

Sophocles' *Electra* was surprisingly neglected in revival until recent times. This play shows us a bitter heroine successful in her vengeance, with her brother's help. The production by Max Reinhardt in Berlin in 1903, 'translated' by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, is so free that it barely qualifies as a 'version' of Sophocles. There is no Tutor, no reported chariot race, no urn even, no recognition of Clytaemestra's body as Orestes and Electra play their cat-and-mouse game with Aegisthus.

Tadashi Suzuki took his *Clytemnestra* to Delphi, Greece, after it was performed in Toga, Japan in 1983. *Clytemnestra* combined Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes*. Suzuki's *Electra* was performed at Delphi in 1995. He reduced and rearranged texts drastically, arguing that he wanted to show the breakdown of the family and family values in Japan.

Suzuki's Clytemnestra in the 1983 version was dressed in a traditional Japanese Noh costume, whereas the children wore informal western clothing. Orestes threw the knife with which he killed his mother into a Marlboro wastebasket. Modern Japanese music was combined with music from Noh. The past mingled with the present, East with West.

Richard Strauss' opera *Elektra* (1909), with a superb libretto by von Hofmannsthal, emphasized the Freudian aspects of the heroine's character, including her obsession with her father. Andrei Serban's *An Ancient Trilogy*, which included *Electra*, was performed in Romania in 1989 as a critique of the Ceausescu family and regime.

Frank McGuinness' translation in 1997 toured England with Zoe Wanamaker as Electra, finding great success in New York as well. David Leveaux directed. Wanamaker had just lost her father, and she delivered an impassioned performance. A throbbing deep beat in the background greeted the audience at the beginning. The set showed us something like Bosnia, devastated buildings, and a suggestion of ancient ruins with a column overturned. The dress was modern Sarajevo: suggestions of Moslem women in

the Chorus with their hair covered. Electra appeared with her hair in tatters: hunks cut out and bleeding sores. She wore a large overcoat, which suggested it may have been her father's. Fog filled the stage, and rain; one drop ceaselessly fell and splashed throughout the entire performance.

Philoctetes (409 BC) shows us another hero who is as stubborn as all the others, and who has his double in the young Neoptolemus whom Odysseus tries to corrupt. Both are loyal to honour and truth and will not speak the lies of politicians as Agamemnon and Menelaus did in *Ajax*, and as Odysseus does here. Heracles, the *ur*-hero of Greece, returns in his glory to defend their honourable choice.

This play has inspired many playwrights, who have found its philosophical or political insights relevant to the present. André Gide's *Philoctetes, or the Treatise on Three Ethics* (1898) shows the existentialist progression from love of one's country to love of another and finally to the most valid love: love of self. This was a play about love and identity and a celebration of love between men.

More political and tough-minded was Heiner Müller's *Philoctetes* (1965, followed by another version, *Philoktet, Der Horatier* 1968). This was Müller's first play on a classical theme. It offers an impassioned ideological critique of a man in power who sought more power with no ethical restraint. Odysseus is here a soldier blindly following immoral orders. Also political was Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* (1990), based on *Philoctetes*, and dealing with the Irish situation, and people's persistence in nursing old wounds. His play proceeds from, and ends in, optimism. Heaney hopes 'for a great sea-change/On the far side of revenge/ ... that a further shore is reachable from here'.

There is an exposition that not only locates the Chorus in its mediating function, but lays out the theme of the play: a focus on the wound, rather than the cure. In this respect Heaney suggested this had hindered the peace process up to now.

Heaney's optimism shone at the end in a speech delivered by the Chorus-leader. These words were not in Sophocles, but in modern Ireland:

Human beings suffer,
They torture one another,
They get hurt and get hard.
No poem or play or song
Can fully right a wrong
Inflicted and endured.

The innocent in gaols
Beat on their bars together.

A hunger-striker's father
Stands in the graveyard dumb.
The police widow in veils
Faints at the funeral home.

History says, *Don't hope*
On this side of the grave.
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.

The sufferings on both sides are mentioned. The hope is for a peaceful settlement, and a healing of the wound of hate. The poetry is superb.

All these productions show that Greek tragedy crosses boundaries of countries, traditional morality, sex, language, and time. They enjoy new life in every transformation. Some succeed better than others, particularly when they are not monuments to their author's or director's conceits, but instead are faithful to the spirit of the ancient Greek playwrights. They demonstrate that the ancient plays still speak loudly and clearly to modern audiences in languages they understand, and are as powerful and relevant to their own times and cultures as were the ancient Greek originals.

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